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Sky's not the limit

Roy Greenslade on Rupert Murdoch

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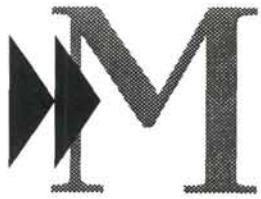

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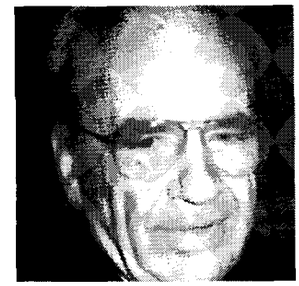

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September speak-out

Speakers are warming up for a lively examination of the Erosion of Dissent in the 1990s, which is taking place on Tuesday 14 September at St James's Church, Piccadilly, London W1. If you want to know what's happening to protest in Great Britain, then be there for 6.30pm. It's free.

Tickets are going rapidly for the sneak preview of Ken Loach's new film *Raining Stones*. They cost £5 and Barry Norman will be there to share his views on Loach's latest work. Fill in the coupon below to ensure your seat on Sunday 19 September at the Camden Plaza, 221 Camden High Street, London.

Looking forward, we move to October and an extravaganza not to be missed! A night of traditional entertainment, song, music and cabaret is to be had at Brick Lane Music Hall, London on Friday 15 October. Tickets are £20 and include a three-course meal and, of course, all proceeds will go to the Defence Fund. Book your place before somebody else does!

Cricket players are, at this very moment, limbering up for what's sure to be a thrilling John Major Memorial Cricket Match. Watch Steve Platt, Sean French, Angela Eagle and others display their bowling, batting and chatting skills in Huntingdon on Saturday 18th September. Sun hats and picnic stools should be taken to the St Peter's Road Cricket Ground for 2pm.

Also, we still want more parties to be held. Why not plan an autumn Defence Fund Party to take your mind off the approach of chilly days? Party packs are still available from Nicola Baird or Nyta Mann on 071-739 3211.

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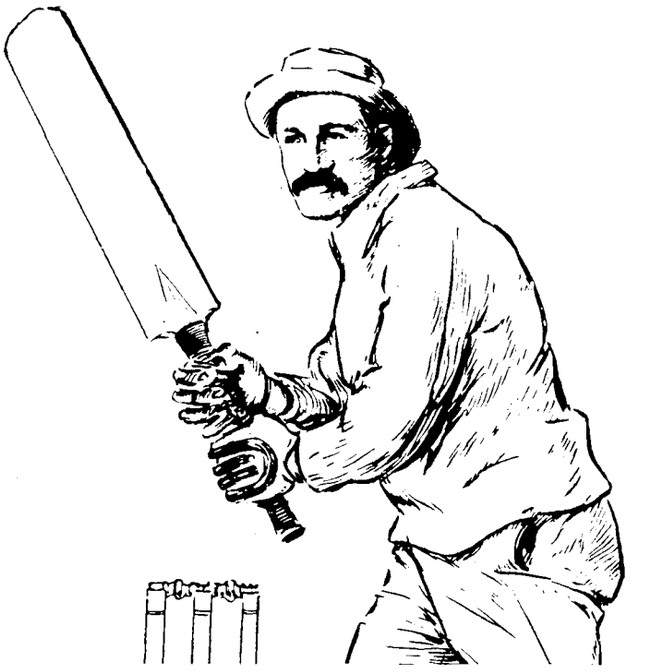

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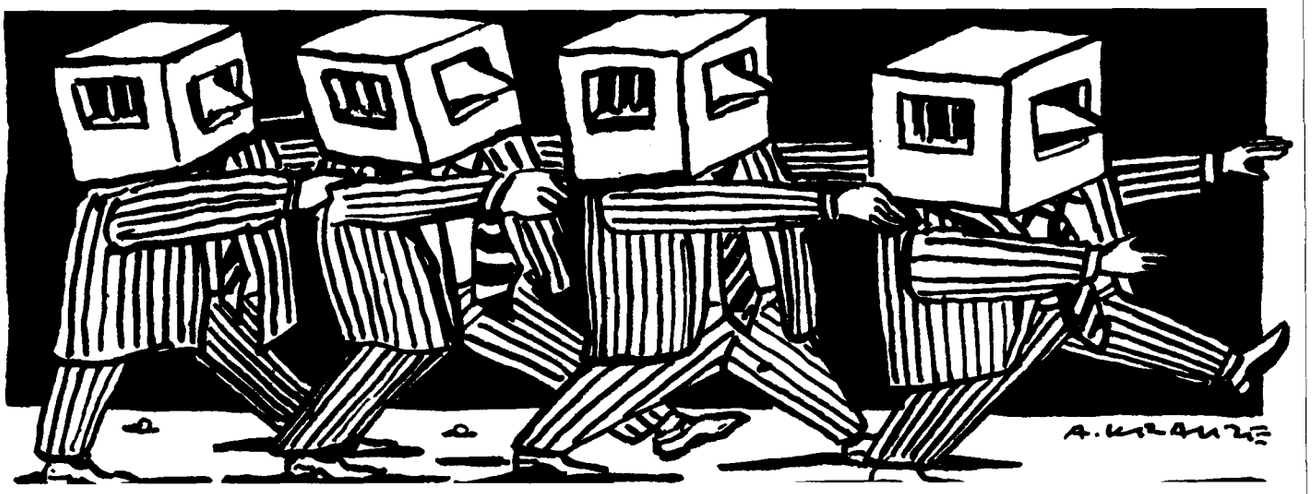

Howard's prison prejudices

Last month, a letter was leaked from Home Secretary Michael Howard's office indicating that the cabinet's most senior right-winger wants prison to become "a more austere experience while minimising the risk of control problems arising from too sudden a change of direction". This week, Wymott prison in Lancashire erupted in the worst prison rioting seen in Britain since Strangeways in April 1990. Judge Stephen Tumin, chief inspector of prisons, has been asked to investigate; an urgent interim report is expected within a month.

Judge Tumin could well argue that he has already produced a perfectly good report on prison disturbances, with Lord Justice Woolf, published, to great fanfare and lavish praise, in February 1991. The Woolf report made 204 recommendations, proposing fundamental changes to almost every aspect of the prison system. It called for more opportunities for prisoners to maintain their links with their families, for better conditions, and for improved standards of justice in dealing with prisoners' complaints. The majority of the Woolf recommendations have not been implemented.

But it is unlikely that mere repetition of the Woolf report's proposals would go down well with Howard. The government is on the defensive over law and order, and faces a tricky party conference within a month. The Tory tabloids are howling for Howard to respond to Wymott with a crackdown on prisoners, and they are likely to find a sympathetic hearing. Last weekend, before the riot, the Home Secretary told the *Daily Star*: "I know that the scales of justice have been tipped too far in favour of the criminal. I intend to do all I can to put the balance right. And when the courts sentence more criminals to prison, I will make sure that there are enough prison places to keep them out of harm's way."

This is not just a line for the right-wing press. Howard came to the Home Office with the conviction that, in the past few years, criminal justice policy, especially the white paper that culminated in the 1991 Criminal Justice Act (which said that prison was an expensive way of making bad people worse), demonstrated that Home Office officials had developed far too cosy a relationship with the penal reform lobby, and that they had essentially gone native.

Policy is now being made with minimal consultation with either officials or agencies and services with experience and expertise in working with offenders. Howard has publicly stated his contempt for criminologists and penal reformers.

The trouble with this approach is obvious. Howard is not listening to the people who know what's going on—who know what has been tried before, what is happening in other countries, what re-offending rates are, and so on. As a result, the government's penal policy lurches from crisis to crisis, constantly responding to short-term problems that actually need coherent long-term strategies. Insofar as there is any consistency, it is based on the right-wing prejudices that the best way to deal with offenders is to lock them up and that the main purpose of policy should be to ensure that the maximum number of prison places is provided as cheaply as possible (hence the enthusiasm for private jails).

Britain has a higher proportion of its population in prison than any other country in Europe, a statistic that simply can't be justified on any rational basis. Only one in four people imprisoned each year have committed crimes involving violence, sex, robbery or drugs. Imprisonment is largely ineffective either as a deterrent or as a way of rehabilitating people. Indeed, there are several studies that have suggested that offenders who have been in prison offend more frequently and commit more serious offences than those who have been dealt with in the community for similar crimes. For the Home Secretary to talk about a higher prison population in welcoming terms is worrying indeed: the government should be introducing measures to reduce the number of people that the courts send to jail.

It should also face the facts about the deleterious effects of harsh prison regimes. In August 1991, there were major disturbances at Moorland Young Offender Institution near Doncaster. Like Wymott, Moorland was presented by the government and its supporters in the press as a soft prison, with the implication that recalcitrant prisoners could be controlled only by harsh discipline. The government subsequently introduced a new offence of "prison mutiny" carrying a maximum ten-year prison sentence.

Yet a report leaked to the *Observer* in November 1991, found that the riot was actually the result of chaotic management, incoherent security, consistently poor staff-inmate relations with "inconsistent and random application of petty rules, and lack of and obstruction of access to management and the Board of Visitors". Judge Tumin's report on Wymott a year ago found a prison barely managed at all, with drugs readily available and a deeply corrupting regime.

The Prison Officers Association, not usually progressive in its views, is right to argue that riots are an inevitable outcome of the prison service having to drive down costs to compete with the private sector. And as the National Association of Probation Officers says, there is a deep unease among prisoners in the wake of last month's leaked letter. They are afraid of restrictions on home leave, education, work outside the prison and leisure activities.

The underlying thrust of Lord Justice Woolf's report is that if you don't treat people with dignity, humanity and justice, they are unlikely to behave that way towards others. In this light, Howard's request in last month's leaked letter for an assessment from officials of the savings that could be made from a change in policy, "recognising that this represents quite a departure from some of the commitments set out post-Woolf" sends a chill down the spine.

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Battle of wills over OMOV

The heat is on the GMB leader, John Edmonds. More than anyone, he stirred up the battle against one member, one vote for Labour Party parliamentary selections, and it is he who is now expected to yield to John Smith.

Edmonds was a leadership loyalist through the Kinnock years. It was his union that held the critical balance of power. Whenever a deal was to be done, Edmonds could always be found at the centre of things.

The left-wing transport workers have traditionally been allowed to keep their ideological purity. They are in no mood to change their mind over one member, one vote, and are unlikely to do so. The GMB is a different creature. Power-broking is in its nature.

Edmonds is in an agony of indecision. He put himself at the forefront of the campaign against OMOV and it will be almost as embarrassing for him to back down as for Smith. Activists in his own union are 100 per cent against him giving way, and he has the new super union with the TGWU—and his own future in it—to think about. He is well and truly cornered.

Edmonds still has the power to win this debate. The shopworkers and Nupe may be moving Smith's way, but the OMOV camp has counted on them switching sides from the start. If MSF moves, the arithmetic changes, but even then, the result would be too close to call. The constituency parties now have 30 per cent of the vote at conference and, to Smith's great disappointment, only half of them are supporting OMOV.

The question for Edmonds is: does he want to press the destruct button or not? If he does, there is no agreement between the GMB and the TGWU over what should replace Smith's plans for levy-plus. The GMB still wants to have a register of Labour-supporting trade unionists; the TGWU prefers the old system, with a few new democratic checks and balances. The private meeting of anti-OMOV trade unionists at the TUC conference in Brighton failed to resolve this problem.

Smith has closed off most escape routes. His plans are going to be presented to the Labour conference as those of the national executive, which he browbeat into submission before the parliamentary recess. If the conference votes against these proposals, Labour will be left without any method of selecting parliamentary candidates at all. There will be a vaccum, which the anti-OMOV unions have shown they are incapable of filling.

This week, Smith has continued to turn the screw. The GMB might have been prepared to accept his proposals for levy-plus, so long as the unions were allowed to pay the £3 top-up fee for trade unionists. At Brighton, however, Smith explicitly ruled out that compromise. He made it very clear at a press conference that he was not going to blink first.

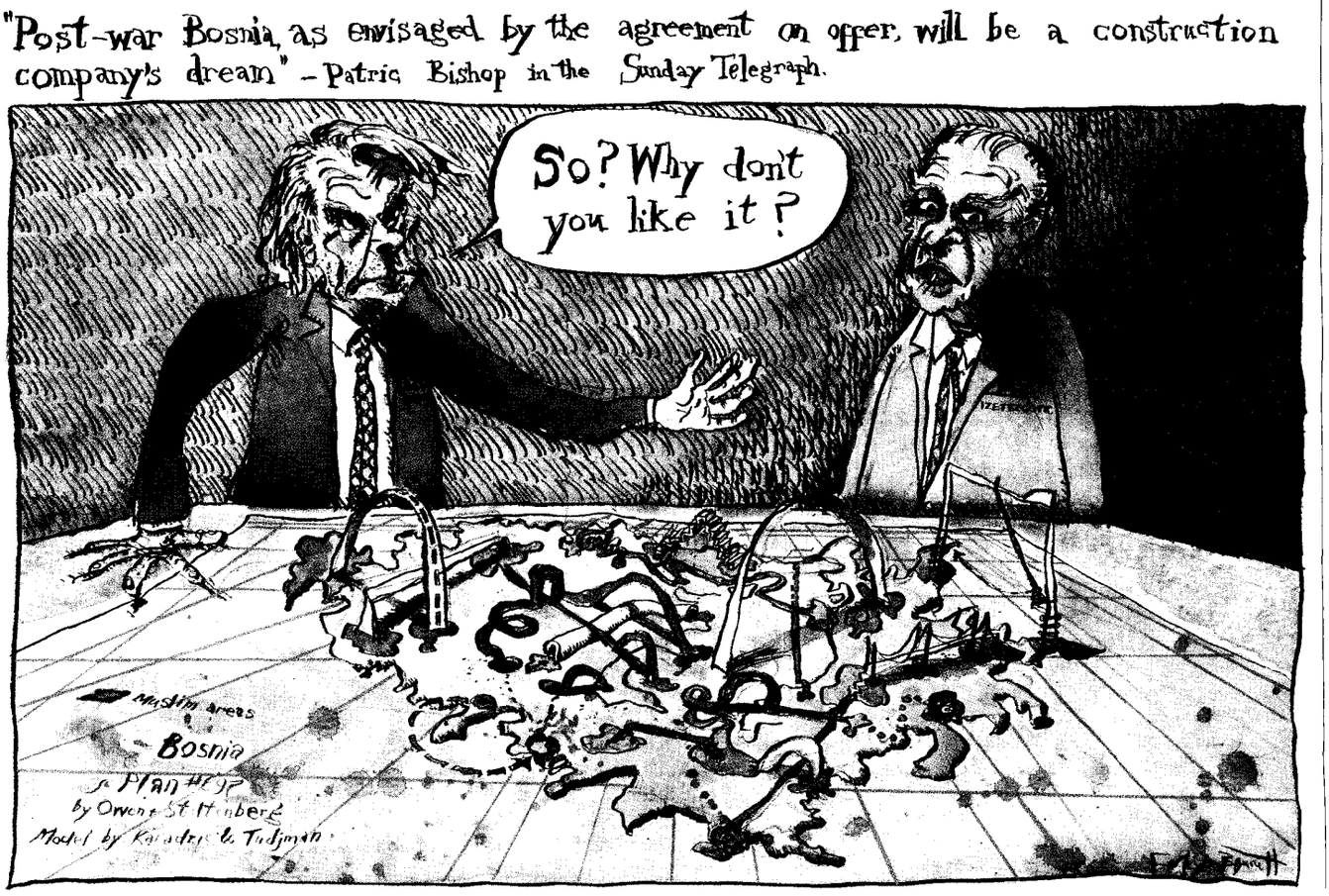
The GMB is now trying for one last compromise. The hope is that Smith will agree to keep the most recent system for selecting candidates in place (with the proviso that trade union branches ballot their members on an individual basis), while attempts are made to recruit trade unionists into the party with a cut-rate £3 joining fee. If the numbers take off —an unlikely scenario—Smith can then have his levy-plus.

There is no reason for Smith to accept this deal, since a similar scheme charging trade unionists £5 did not bring a mass influx of members into the party. Smith has more to gain by holding his nerve.

If the GMB does yield, Smith will be hailed as a conquering hero by some of the OMOV camp, who believe a victory over the trade unions will do wonders for his image. There will be comparisons made with Kinnock's triumph over the Militant Tendency in 1985.

It would be a mistake to gloat in this way. The unions do not deserve to be treated like Trotskyist entryists. Although they are wrong to resist OMOV, it is an issue about which they feel genuinely passionate. Smith may be able to cow them into submission, but he should beware of triumphalism.

FELIX BENNETT


"Post-war Bosnia, as envisaged by the agreement on offer, will be a construction company's dream" - Patric Bishop in the Sunday Telegraph.
So? Why don't you like it?
Muslim areas
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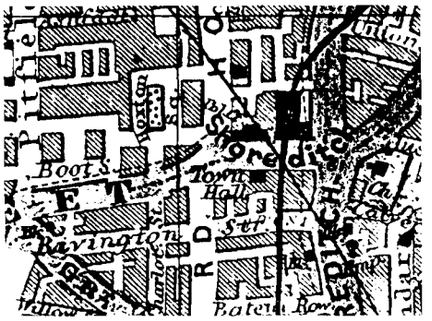

A 21-gun salute to the bare-faced cheek of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAATU) this week, following the success of its mission to penetrate the watertight security surrounding the government's arms fair in Aldershot last weekend (see page 12). A small battalion of CAATU demonstrators swept through the many roadblocks around the Aldershot base by arriving in a hired, chauffeur-driven Daimler. The infiltrators, dressed up as past beneficiaries of Britain's arms trade, such as Saddam Hussein and General Augusto Pinochet, were respectfully saluted and escorted to the VIP security entrance. The wheeze was only rumbled when a cursory bomb-search of "General Galtieri's" briefcase revealed that it was full of Monopoly money—by which time "Ivan the Terrible", dressed in full 16th-century regalia, had already been allowed in. More alarmingly, so had "Saddam".

NSS was delighted to hear from the Oxford University Conservative Association this week, which writes asking if we "would be interested in some form of association with us in the coming term". "Your publication," it goes on to assure us, "is of interest to our members." Suggestions for the proposed "association" include sponsoring speaker meetings. Next term's guests include David Mellor, Kenneth Baker "and possibly even more important figures". For their money, sponsors get their logo on all posters and invitations. Hmmm, tempting. If it can book John Major, our cheque is in the post.

But the OUCA is also refreshingly non-sectarian in its quest for sponsors: "We do not regard such interest as implying support for the government and its policies." No indeed, and—if its last "term card" is anything to go by—it practices what it preaches. Under the headline "Bowing to mediocrity", one Owen Mathews writes that: "The weak, as John Major has shown, are a long time in politics." Not bad, not bad, and just in case you're in any doubt, young Master Mathews continues: "Why have the myriad shortcomings of this 'gilded child of dirt' (as Pope described that other hopeless prime minister, Lord Newcastle) been tolerated for so long by the political nation?" Answers on one side of the paper only, please.

Well that's it then; the Tories must have given up all hope of winning the next election. What else can they do, now that the story has broken in Campaign magazine: the Today newspaper has announced that it is switching allegiance to the Other Side. Yes, that means Labour. There's been no conversion on the road to Damascus by Rupe the Scoop, however; the plan is to wipe the floor with the Daily Mirror by donning new political clothes. Naturally, the paper won't be any party's pussycat: "Today will support the way it feels the Labour Party ought to be run—it will not support the way the party is being run," a News International source firmly states. Shoreditch will enjoy watching Today trying to convince its readers of the error of Gordon Brown's ways. The sight of a Murdoch newspaper calling for higher taxes cannot come a moment too soon.

Shoreditch was unsurprised by the story in last week's *Guardian* revealing that the Police Federation would be taking its campaign against the hated Sheehy Report to the pages of *New Times*—the fortnightly rag of Democratic Left. After all, the ever-changing ex-bolsheviks have fond memories of the Federation's corporate affairs manager Tony Judge, who helps steer the Fed's promotional campaigns, from when he was a keen and eager member of the Young Communists League. Comrade Judge is refreshingly unrepentant: "Yes, I was in the YCL! And not only that, I was a GLC councillor, a Labour parliamentary candidate three times, and am still a member of the Labour Party."

Meanwhile Alan Eastwood, outgoing head of the Fed, is none too pleased that his current plans to become a Tory MP have become known. Shoreditch understands the embarrassment such an anti-social condition can provoke, but fears this is not the reason for Eastwood's coyness; rather that his empassioned fulminations against Sheehy's proposed market "reforms" probably wouldn't have been quite as well received by the rank and file if they had known he was hankering to enter the Commons on the side of the same party that had foisted Sheehy upon them.

A mini-battle has broken out between the Sealed Knot and the English Civil War Society—rival teams for people who like to replay the 17th century (see NSS, 20 August). The Shropshire Star reports that Sealed Knot member Christine Perkins and her elderly mother were "manhandled" at the English Civil War Society event last month at Stokesay Castle. Ms Perkins, who was in period costume, describes her treatment as "disgusting and very embarrassing". Chris Johnson, from the English Civil War Society, denies any "manhandling", but agrees that the pair were asked to leave the battlefield. "The Sealed Knot would be very aggrieved if any of our members turned up at their events. It's like gatecrashing someone else's party—rather a rude thing to do." What enraged the purists, he explains, was the sight of "one wearing sunglasses and the other smoking a cigarette; totally anachronistic and quite offensive".

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

2 September: "Labour learns lesson on tax," whoops the *Daily Express*: "At long last the opposition is learning the economic and political lesson about taxes: Low Taxes—Good, High Taxes—Bad." But the article goes on: "It would be naive to imagine that in its heart of hearts Labour has seen the error of its ways. The party still contains too many individuals who imbibed with their mothers' milk the notion that high taxation will help to achieve the socialist goal they seek." Well, that's a relief.

3 September: The *Daily Express* once had, apparently, grave misgivings about Michael Howard's plans to privatise part of the prison service. But no longer. "Those misgivings weaken day by day as all-out opponents give voice." The paper writes that the argument from the all-out opponents that helped it make up its mind is the shocking call, by the prison governors association, for "the government to take time to evaluate the success of private prisons before pressing on ahead". The *Daily Mail* adds its own inimical arguments: "If the move stimulates the rest of the system to emulate the 25 per cent savings so far notched up at the two jails already under private management, it will be a powerful aid in the fight against crime. For the less it costs, the greater the number of violent or persistent offenders we can afford to lock away."

Howard is under front-page attack from the *Daily Star*, which renames him Michael "Coward": "No doubt you will be making a rousing speech at the Tory annual conference, and the brown-tongued party faithful will give you a standing ovation . . . Let's have no more promises that come to nothing. Just make Britain a decent, safe place to live and bring up children again."

4 September: "The whole of Britain," says the *Daily Star*, "reacted yesterday to [our] outburst against lawlessness." Including Michael Howard, who seems to have said a little more than perhaps he now feels he should. According to the *Star* front page: "Home Secretary promises *Daily Star* readers if he can't cut crime . . . 'I'll pack it in.'"

5 September: The *Mail on Sunday* Black Dog column reveals that John Redwood, the Thatcherite Secretary of State for Wales, is now being "spoken of as the likely candidate to stop Clarke's 'dig for victory' from No 11 to No 10". An "admirer" of Redwood is quoted, revealing that: "He has a personality problem—he doesn't seem to have one." So it must be true then.

8 September: The *Daily Mail* has come over all poetic following John Smith's speech to the TUC congress, and complains that "inside the arena, no wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie could have been more mouse-like a master of discretion than John Smith. Not a peep about the dreaded OMOV . . . Did ever prisoner so cravenly feel obliged to kiss the fetters he schemes to break?"

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When I am away on holiday I make no attempt to track down English papers or to keep up with the news. On the other hand, if I stumble across any printed matter by chance, I scour it with pathetic thoroughness. While I was away last month, I found an old copy of *Hello!* in the pile of papers used for lighting the fire. Hence, I now know that Elizabeth Emanuel, one half of the team that designed Lady Di's wedding dress, currently lives on a barge with a long-haired man ten years younger than she is, and that her ambition is to become a movie designer. I know that after years of disappointment, Julia Roberts has married the country singer, Lyle Lovett.

Further down in the pile, there was a yellowing *Sunday Times*. While twisting it into handy kindling material, I read a bizarre article by Michael Winner about getting what you want in restaurants. He recalled with evident pride how a waiter at some expensive establishment had assured him that he was as much trouble as 30 ordinary people. And yet, Winner mused, why was it that he seemed always to be on the receiving end of such poor service? At L'Ortolan, near Reading, one of the most distinguished restaurants in Britain, he had been placed right next to the lavatory. At Sir Terence Conran's hyped new eaterie in central London, he had been served with some patently unfresh fish. The shocking litany continued.

To Winner, this was just yet another example of What's Wrong With Britain Today, and he dealt with such failings uncompromisingly. He stood up and shouted. When bread was delayed, he obtained it himself and began serving other customers.

In order to furnish Winner with a more plausible explanation, I need to refer to one of the masterpieces of his friend, John Cleese. The great "Basil the Rat" episode of *Fawlty Towers* begins with the discovery that the waiter, Manuel, has been keeping a pet rat, sold to him by a pet-shop owner with the fraudulent assurance that it was a Siberian hamster. Basil Fawlty insists that the rat be disposed of before the impending visit of a health inspector and, when confronted with the misery of a bereft Manuel, remarks: "Well, look at it from the rat's point of view. How would you like to spend the rest of your life having Manuel waiting on *you*?"

Winner's strictures against the British catering trade need to be seen according to a similar perspective. If you had devoted years of your life creating a great restaurant, a place of culinary artistry, an oasis of repose from the pressures and distractions of the cruel world outside, how would you react if you saw Michael Winner walking into it? This is the man who cast Charles Bronson as a liberal, pacifist architect in *Death Wish* and then had to have his wife and daughter graphically raped on screen in order to goad him into becoming a marauding vigilante. This is the man who not only had the bad taste to make a new screen version of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*—as if the Howard Hawks' version starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall could ever be superseded—but then set it in the home counties of England.

Sean French finds he is nice to everyone; well, except Michael Winner

Fortunately, the film was not a financial success, or there might have been more cut-price remakes in a similar vein. *Lawrence of Cheam*, perhaps.

If Winner was unfortunate enough to walk into any establishment of mine, he'd be seated next to the lavatory only if the packing case next to the bin of potato peelings out in the alley happened to be already occupied. If he tried his trick of gaining attention, the specifics of which mercifully escape me, but involved something like standing up and shouting or banging the table with his spoon, then I would have him taken for a close inspection of our mincing machine: "Jean-Paul, switch it on at the slow-grind setting. And now, Mr Winner, where is Charles Bronson, when you really need him?"

If I were Michael Winner, I would be more worried by the things I couldn't see in the restaurants I attended. There are terrible stories about what people in restaurant kitchens do to the dishes destined for customers not in favour. There might be a frustrated film critic taking his revenge on a dish destined for the director's table, crying, "*That's* for *Won Ton Ton: The Dog that Saved Hollywood*," while doing something unmentionable to Winner's sweetbreads.

But then perhaps I am repelled by Winner's strategy because I couldn't manage it myself. In this week's *Observer* magazine, I answered a psychological questionnaire on the subject, "are you a bully?", and scored a quite remarkable *nul points*, as Norway used to achieve so regularly in the Eurovision Song Contest. I emerged as flawlessly nice. I had not hit anybody in the past year; I have not, so far as I know, ever reduced a colleague to tears (except, perhaps, by being outrageously late with an article, but that's not the same thing); I am never cruel to animals; I have not shouted at a colleague, threatened someone with violence or got my own way with intimidation in the past month.

I thought this score would be highly desirable. Surely it is impossible to be too little of a bully, to be lacking in any form of bulliness? Not according to Mark McDermott, a lecturer in psychology, who had designed the test: "0-3 You are one of life's doormats. Stop being so pathetic, and join an assertiveness class." I don't know, I'd feel a bit nervous about doing something as assertive as that.

I see his point, though. I am pathologically wary of any form of face-to-face conflict. Let me give an example, of which I was reminded by my earlier mention of John Cleese. I was recently at a social event where I was seated opposite John Cleese's wife. She is American, obviously very nice and lacking in any kind of false reserve. She looked at my table placename, and addressed me with great charm: "Sean, you've worked with John haven't you? I'm sure you've been to the house." I murmured meaningless things in a typically English harrumphing, mumbling sort of way. Hmm, yes, maybe, I don't quite remember, perhaps she was right, but I wasn't sure that I had actually done any work as such with her husband, yet on the other hand, now that she mentioned it . . .

In reality, I was absolutely sure that I had never met Cleese, but I also knew why my name sounded familiar to her. A few years ago, I was virtually the only film critic to give Cleese's film, *A Fish Called Wanda*, an unfavourable review. And I know that Cleese was aware of this because he contacted *NSS* personally in order to ask for copies of anything I had written about the film. He then designed a special advertisement quoting unfavourable statements about the film, two of which were by me and the rest were from strange rustic publications featuring film critics whose judgments were presumably warped by mad cow disease and generations of inbreeding.

Quite amusing, and it is good for critics to be slapped back at occasionally, but I wasn't going to remind Mrs Cleese of it if she didn't remember it herself. The first act, or non-act, of cowardice was in my extravagant prevarication in order to avoid the mildest possibility of a conflict that would not have mattered much even if it had occurred. The second, I suppose, is in writing about it now, safely shut up in my room, which perhaps may seem contemptible to my better-adjusted readers.

I honestly wish I had a Mediterranean temperament and could yell at people whenever I was angry, but I still wouldn't want to make scenes in restaurants. A few years ago, there was a couple who used to go out for meals in Camden Town. Towards the end of the evening they would complain about their meal in a loud and obscene manner. The strategy was that the management would become so embarrassed they would just let them leave without paying, to avoid a scene. I chanced to be present at one of their impromptu performances and it was an appalling experience. The dignified Chinese waiters icily escorted the obscenely complaining diners outside. But it may not have been a scam at all, it may just have been Michael Winner and Jenny Seagrove having a normal night out.

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Somewhere to the left of Genghis Khan

By far the most entertaining, as well as the most instructive, nugget quarried by the *Sunday Times* from Kenneth Baker's tummy-turning memoirs is the quote from Viscount Whitelaw about John Major. According to Mr Baker, dear old Willie remarked just before the second ballot in the fateful leadership contest that many people would vote for Major in the belief that he was right-wing, but that they would discover that he wasn't.

Now, I yield to no one in my admiration and affection for Willie Whitelaw, who is universally classified as both a WOB and also a DOS—which is Westminster-speak for Wise Old Bird and Decent Old Soul. In purely Conservative terms, Lady Thatcher could not have survived for as long as she did if it had not been for the loyalty he gave her as a matter of duty. From the point of view of the rest of the human race, we must all be grateful for the calming advice he sometimes managed to get through to her in moments of crisis.

But in the matter of Mr Major's political orientation I suspect that Willie's legendary antennae played him false. This puts him in the same situation as Ken Livingstone—who was widely quoted at the time of Major's ascent to the premiership with remarks about what a lefty he had been when the two of them were on opposite sides of Lambeth Council—and also Mrs Thatcher herself. All three seem to have fallen victim to John's nice smile, and even more to his talent for keeping his mouth shut at critical moments.

I argued last week, with a different agenda, that Mr Major got the premiership largely by convincing Lady Thatcher that he was a genuine "one of us" Thatcherite—a view which she unwisely conveyed, with typical forcefulness, to people like Sir Gardiner and his allies on the loony right. It got Major elected, under wholly false colours. But that the banner he carried was a blatant lie does not establish that Lord Whitelaw's analysis was correct.

For the truth, which is now rapidly becoming obvious even to the new generation of neanderthal Conservative backbenchers, is that John Major *is* a right-winger in every respect which matters, save for his unThatcherite attitude to Europe and his willingness to yield to the inevitable in matters of monetary policy and taxation. If we are realists, we must acknowledge that his current obsession with things like wholesale privatisation and still more anti-union legislation is a deliberate and calculated bid to regain the trust and support of . . . well, people like Sir G Gardiner and his allies on the loony right.

No other interpretation can account for the almost insane list of state institutions now being considered for privatisation. Not only do ministers appear ready to press ahead with selling off the railways rail by rail, and the prisons jail by jail. They are now actively drawing up plans for the privatisation of the thousand-year-old Royal Mint and (most incredible of all) the Inland Revenue.

Meanwhile, the increasingly insufferable Virginia Bottomley shows no sign of being deterred from her programme for the destruction of London's network of world-famous teaching hospitals. Encouraged by her friend John, she has already put more fanaticism into ramming market values down the throat of Britain's best-loved collective institution than even the inventor of her so-called health "reforms", Kenneth Clarke.

And to cap this gruesome catalogue, that paragon of Conservative moderacy, David Hunt, has just revealed on BBC radio that he is not content with the achievements of his predecessors at the Department of Employment—the most recent of which was the abolition of the last vestiges of protection for the most vulnerable workers. Presumably with Mr Major's knowledge and approval, he has announced that he proposes still more legislation aimed at the already hog-tied trades union movement.

Major, for all his nice manners, is not much easier to deflect from a path he has chosen than Thatcher ever was

Now it is just possible after 13 years of genuine hands-on Thatcherism, that the British public have become so inured to measures of this kind that they don't see them as particularly right-wing. But measured against the standards which even Lady Thatcher espoused only a few years ago, the Major programme must be counted pretty far out. By the standards of a Harold Macmillan, a Rab Butler, an Iain Macleod, or any other traditional Conservative of the post-war era it can only be described as raving lunacy.

So much for Lord Whitelaw's assessment—though in mitigation I hasten to add that the noble viscount expressed his opinion before John Major had even announced he would run for the premiership, without the advantage of two years' experience of his performance. I have reason to believe that Willie has indeed amended his view since then.

But if a change of mind in such an exalted quarter still doesn't scare Mr Major, he may have to pay more attention to the accumulating evidence that the great British public is getting fed up with the constant upheaval that they now associate with so-called "Conservative" governments. The latest item in this catalogue of disillusionment appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* last Monday.

To the evident astonishment of its editors, the paper recorded that a survey of its true blue readers revealed them as totally at odds with the government's current approach to "green" issues. Above all, they had no time for the Cabinet's present emphasis on private road transport at the expense of public transport. No fewer than 83 per cent wanted the proceeds from any future road-pricing scheme to be spent on improved public transport. Only 17 per cent thought it should pay for bigger and better roads.

As the paper itself remarked, this was middle England, the very backbone of the nation, speaking. Not sandalled and bearded *Guardian* readers, but trusted Tory voters, were telling their favourite paper that what they wanted from "their" government wasn't 14-lane motorways, but proper bus services and rail fares not priced in gold ingots.

Perhaps even this well-meant warning from the government's natural supporters will still not prove sufficient to deflect ministers from their mad course. In spite of plentiful evidence that the public wants none of it, the pseudo-privatisation of our hospital service is actually gathering momentum rather than losing it. And there is more than enough additional evidence that Mr Major, for all his nice manners, is not much easier to deflect from a path he has chosen than Lady Thatcher ever was. Even his children have remarked that—according to Penny Junor in the *Sunday Express*—he sometimes seems unable to hear.

But whatever Mr Major makes of the *Daily Telegraph*'s findings, there is one clear message for Labour. It is that the tide of public opinion is on the turn, whereever the clash between collective interests and private profit becomes plain for all to see. This may not mean 1945 socialism is back on the agenda. But it does mean the idea of the community is a vote-winning issue once more.

We now know that quite conservative people are returning to the realisation that many essential public services can't possibly be run by market forces. High on the list of such things is the protection of our environment. This is an opportunity that Labour's leaders, with a little less of the paralysing caution we have witnessed in the past year, are well placed to exploit.

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The PLO's wretched deal

As far back as the summer of 1968, a year after the Six Day War, a Labour government in Israel put forward the Allon Plan, whose terms were that Israel would keep whatever land and resources it found of value on the occupied West Bank, but cede the Arab population centres to Jordan or to some agency supervising stateless Palestinians. And in 1992, that implacable foe of Labour, General Ariel Sharon, put forward a plan that envisaged 11 cantons for Palestinians, including self-rule for a majority of Arabs in the Gaza Strip.

So the notion of ceding towns on the West Bank or Gaza Strip to Palestinian control is nothing new to Israeli politics, even to a man of the far right like Sharon.

The present prospective deal is still obscure in many substantive areas. It offers the Palestine Liberation Organisation control of the Gaza Strip (excluding the Jewish settlements, with access to half the Strip's water, which will be guarded by the Israeli army) and Jericho, with the prospect of extending the arrangement to other West Bank towns (although the Israelis are unyielding on the matter of the enormous area of greater metropolitan Jerusalem). The Palestinians will be given local autonomy, meaning among other things the right to levy taxes and police themselves, all under the eye of the Israeli army and security forces.

The matter of "mutual recognition" is entirely misleading. In various formulations, the PLO has long recognised Israel's right to exist. The agreement now under discussion contains no commensurate recognition by Israel of any Palestinian right to national self-determination. All that Israel might agree to do is recognise the PLO as a legitimate interlocutor, rather than as an informal one. Nor are there to be other recognised rights of a nation.

What of the 50 per cent of Palestinians not resident in the territories? There are more than a million refugees from 1948 and thereafter resident in Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere. Are their rights, recognised by the UN and other bodies down the years, now to be annulled forever?

This is the last chance for Yasser Arafat, the PLO and its bureaucrats to strut importantly upon the world's stage, brokers of an historic settlement that would see the exiled leadership return to an autonomous Gaza Strip, even though, as one critic remarked bitterly, it is the autonomy of a prisoner-of-war camp.

Many Palestinians are raging about the deal, denouncing the secret brokering done by one man in the name of the Palestinian people. It is indeed true that autocratic leadership of the PLO has reached grotesque proportions. When Arafat was missing, presumed dead, in an air crash last year, the PLO organisation was paralysed until the leader was rescued. Only Arafat had access to the organisation's bank accounts.

Nor will local Palestinian militants who have fought through the long years of occupation and *intifada* on the West Bank and Gaza Strip necessarily welcome the PLO leaders as their suzerains, jetting in from Tunis. Least of all to be welcoming will be the very organisation Arafat hopes to undercut, the fundamentalists in Hamas.

Against any substantive vision of Palestinian self-determination, the plan as mooted at the start of this week is a wretched thing. But what alternative is on offer? Ten years ago, Palestinians could agitate for a UN conference on their future, but those were in the days of a world stage inhabited by two superpowers, not one who is Israel's sponsor and ally.

And even if versions of today's possible deal have been pondered for years in Israel's ruling circles, it is possible to argue that Israel feels itself weaker than in the early 1980s when its army drove north to Beirut. Last month, the bombs and artillery shells rained down on southern Lebanon, but no troops moved north. The Likud coalition that pressed that war in 1982 is now out of office, defeated in part because of overt hostility from the Washington of George Bush and James Baker. A generation ago, Golda Meir said there were no Palestinians, just a bunch of Arabs at the wrong place at the wrong time. Tomorrow, it is likely that the Palestinian flag will fly on the walls of Jericho.

For hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, the thought of an autonomous enclave like Gaza, plus—initially—Jericho as the territorial embodiment of nationhood is like a parody of their hopes. But nowhere is it written that history has to be fair, or that, if rejected, this deal will be succeeded by a better one. The *intifada* proved to the Israelis that the price of total occupation was too high. So, with these pieces of real estate on which to raise their standard, Palestinians can reorganise their political structures beyond the shambles of Arafat's PLO and prepare for new struggles ahead. This is but a stage in their journey.

Alexander Cockburn

10 YEARS AGO

"Disaster in Chile"
14 September 1973

The New Statesman comments on the coup that overthrew the left-wing Popular Unity government in Chile and killed president Salvador Allende

The warning signs were clear. Before the new government drew breath there was the sordid attempt to suborn the CIA with ITT dollars. This was closely followed by the assassination of the liberal General Schneider. Then last June came the shelling of the presidential palace by a fascist-minded army unit. Hard on the heels of this attempted coup came a general strike of the privileged, whose war of attrition had in any case been going on for three years. And the response of the Popular Unity coalition was in every case patient, gentlemanly, cautious—and inadequate. It has been painfully proved again that appeasement of oligarchy does not work even as a temporary accommodation. The appetite of reaction increases with the eating.

The final balance sheet of Popular Unity must be a sober one. Although he had the best of intentions and a vast reservoir of goodwill, President Allende preferred the method of "socialism at a snail's pace", and in doing so found himself defenceless before this latest brutal counterstroke. In the last resort, he gave his people little to fight for, and nothing to fight with. It is a terrible epitaph.

Admiral returns to Hungary

The reburial last Saturday of Hungary's interwar regent, Admiral Miklós Horthy, from a military cemetery in Lisbon to his home town of Kerendes, has become a focus for the persistent debate on the country's historical legacy and future direction.

When Horthy first arrived in Budapest on his white horse in 1919, after the failure of Béla Kun's short-lived Soviet commune, he supervised the "white terror" during which thousands of Jews and communists were brutally murdered. Subsequently, he pursued a nationalist *realpolitik* aimed at restoring Hungary to its pre-1914 borders, which bore fruit, thanks to Hitler's support, between 1938 and 1940. At home, the regime became increasingly virulently anti-Semitic.

While for some Hungarians today the Horthy era represents a golden age of Hungarian pride and awakening, for critics—such as the Democratic Charter Movement, which held a demonstration in Budapest last Friday—Horthy's authoritarian-conservative regime displayed few of the values of democracy and tolerance they want associated with the new Hungarian state.

Despite official declarations that the burial was strictly a family affair, and that every Hungarian enjoys the right to be buried on home soil, the profile given to the event appeared suspiciously like an attempt to rehabilitate Horthy as a tragic hero who did what all good Hungarians would have done. The ceremony was broadcast live on national television and senior members of the government, including interior minister Peter Baross and defence minister Lajos Für, were present. And although prime minister Joszef Antall has claimed that the government has no offi-

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cial position on the historical significance of the Horthy regime, and that those ministers attending were doing so in a private capacity, he had himself appeared on national television a few days before the reburial to declare: "I consider Miklós Horthy a Hungarian patriot. He should be placed into the continuity of the nation, and the awareness of the people."

One reason for Antall's equanimity towards Horthy is that he shares his paternalistic-authoritarian instincts. More important, however, is the shifting political landscape. In April, István Csurka, the far-right vice president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF–the largest party in the governing coalition), was expelled from the party. He subsequently formed the Hungarian Truth and Life Party—and this, along with the proliferation and splintering of other populist parties means that Antall no longer represents a broad church of nationalist voices but is an increasingly isolated politician with an increasingly slender parliamentary majority.

The possibility of a new populist alignment in Hungary was demonstrated by a conference in the lakeside village of Szácszó in western Hungary, which took place in the week before Horthy's reburial. Echoing a 1943 conference that sought a third "Hungarian" way between the twin threats of Stalinism and national socialism, it brought together populists of both left and right, disillusioned by the failure of the HDF to live up to its promise of creating a unifying, nationalist democracy.

Despite the presence at the conference of such diverse figures as Csurka and Imre Poszgay, the former communist leader who now chairs the National Democratic Union, representatives shared a common frustration that the HDF has abandoned its popular, predominantly provincial, roots for a bureaucratic and increasingly pragmatic agenda, delivering Hungary up to the forces of international capital and the "dictatorship of the IMF".

Coming in the same week that Antall welcomed representatives of Europe's conservative parties to the first meeting of the European Democratic Union in a former socialist country, the emergence of this populist platform, more attuned to a search for Hungarian destiny than European integration, highlights the challenge facing Antall and the HDF in retaining the centre ground. His problem is that, for all his undoubted skills as a politician, he cannot disguise his deeply conservative and nationalist inclinations. It is an open question whether he has the ability or the will to turn the HDF into the effective modern, Christian democratic party that it claimed to have already become at the EDU meeting in Budapest.

With the refusal of the HDF to consider any electoral cooperation and the recent announcement by Fidesz and SDS of a liberal electoral pact, the likelihood is that next year's general election will see Hungary, already deeply polarised between liberals and nationalists, moving sharply to the right.

Andrew Bright

LETTER FROM AJACCIO

In the café on the corner of the Rue Bonaparte in Ajaccio, the administrative capital of Corsica, there are several customers, women as well as men, who bear a striking resemblance to Napoleon. Perhaps they are distant relatives. The house where the emperor was born in 1769 lies up an alley nearby, and the whole town is stamped with his mark: with a population of only 50,000, it boasts the title Cité Imperiale, a grand avenue called the Cours Bonaparte and numerous statues and busts of Napoleon himself and his relatives. Cafes and restaurants are called after military victories—Iena, Wagram, Solferino; next to the Café du Premier Consul there is the Café le Petit Caporal; even the cosmetics shop bears his mother's name, Parfumerie Laetitia.

Corsican nationalism rests on a claim of historical distinctness for the 250,000 inhabitants of the island, on a tongue that is claimed as a separate language, and on a critique of the neglect by Corsica of the French state. Signs of the nationalist campaign against the French state are evident enough. Graffiti salute the FLNC guerrillas; French road signs are not just blacked out but often blasted with rifle shots. Corsican nationalism is directed both at the French, derided as *i pinzuti*, the pointed-head ones, a reference to 18th-century officials' hats, but also against Italians, referred to as *luccheși* or Luccans, the area from which migrant workers came in the 19th century. Some walls carry the slogan of the 1970s—IFF—*I Francesi Fora*, French out.

In a rural cafe, the waiter wears a T-shirt with the words: Cuncolta Nazionalista-Herri Battasuna-Sinn Féin

The claim that Corsican is a separate language is problematic: most experts consider it a dialect of Italian, its differences exaggerated by a spelling contrived to make words look as un-Italian as possible. But this is not the only difficulty with the nationalist reconstruction of the Corsican past. There is more than a little incompatibility between Napoleon, who opted for the centralised French state, and the other main local hero, Pascal Paoli, leader of the movement for independence, first against the Genoese in the 1760s, then, with some British help, against the French republic in the 1790s: Napoleon's father had supported Paoli, but Napoleon himself, after early sympathy for Corsican nationalism, threw in his lot with the French revolution, and fought against Paoli's forces.

Another, as yet unacknowleged, problem lies in the emblem of Corsica itself: the "Moor's head". This apparent association with third-world peoples, chosen as the national symbol in the 18th century, is in fact chauvinist, representing the victories of the Crusader King of Aragon over the Muslims.

Amid the standard fare of the local press—pop stars on holiday, forest fires, rabbit shoots, rubbish disposal campaigns—there are signs of an island in some turmoil: killings of political activists (the shoot-up from the moving car seems a favourite), parricides, hostage-taking. The Corsican nationalist movement is in crisis. Originating in the late 1960s, it attacked the French state for neglect of Corsica's economy and for settling 17,000 *pieds noirs* from Algeria.

Violence has, however, been low by Irish, or even Basque, standards, and in 1982 the French socialist government gave the island a separate 61-person regional assembly, with considerable economic powers. Other demands—Corsican road signs, a Corsican university, the right to be taught in Corsican—have also been met.

The nationalists now get around 24 per cent in the elections and the main nationalist coalition, Corsica Nazione, groups three nationalist forces, including Corsi Verdi, the ecologists; but others stay out, and a spate of killings this year points to divisions within the underground movement. The main guerrilla group, FLNC-Historic Tendency, has declared a summer truce against the French state, but claims responsibility for the killing of three militants on the grounds that they were traitors. Statements from various nationalist groups, with throttled indignation and excuses, dot the press. Two other guerrilla groups —FLNC-Habitual Tendency and Resistenza—remain silent.

As elections show, national independence has not been the majority choice: many Corsicans emigrate (women seem particularly keen to do so), and the rest appear committed to left or right variants of the French mainland parties. The nationalists, for their part, search for other international links, in *l'Auropa di i Populi* (Europe of the peoples). In a rural cafe, the waiter wears a T-shirt with the words: Cuncolta Nazionalista-Herri Battasuna-Sinn Féin (to which one could add the names of the outlawed military counterparts of each, FLNC-ETA-IRA). At the annual "international days" of the Cuncolta, which is part of the Corsica Nazione coalition, representatives of several European national movements, including groups from the Canaries, Kosovo, the Basque country, the Jura and South Tirol, proclaim solidarity.

In a context somewhat changed by concessions from the French state, the search for *Corsitude* (loving Corsica) and *Corsite* (feeling Corsican), within a broader Europe, continues, and there are hopes of a separate financial relationship to the EC. But some recall the old saying *Baccala per Corsica*— literally "Cod for Corsica", more liberally rendered as: "Corsica always gets a raw deal."

Fred Halliday

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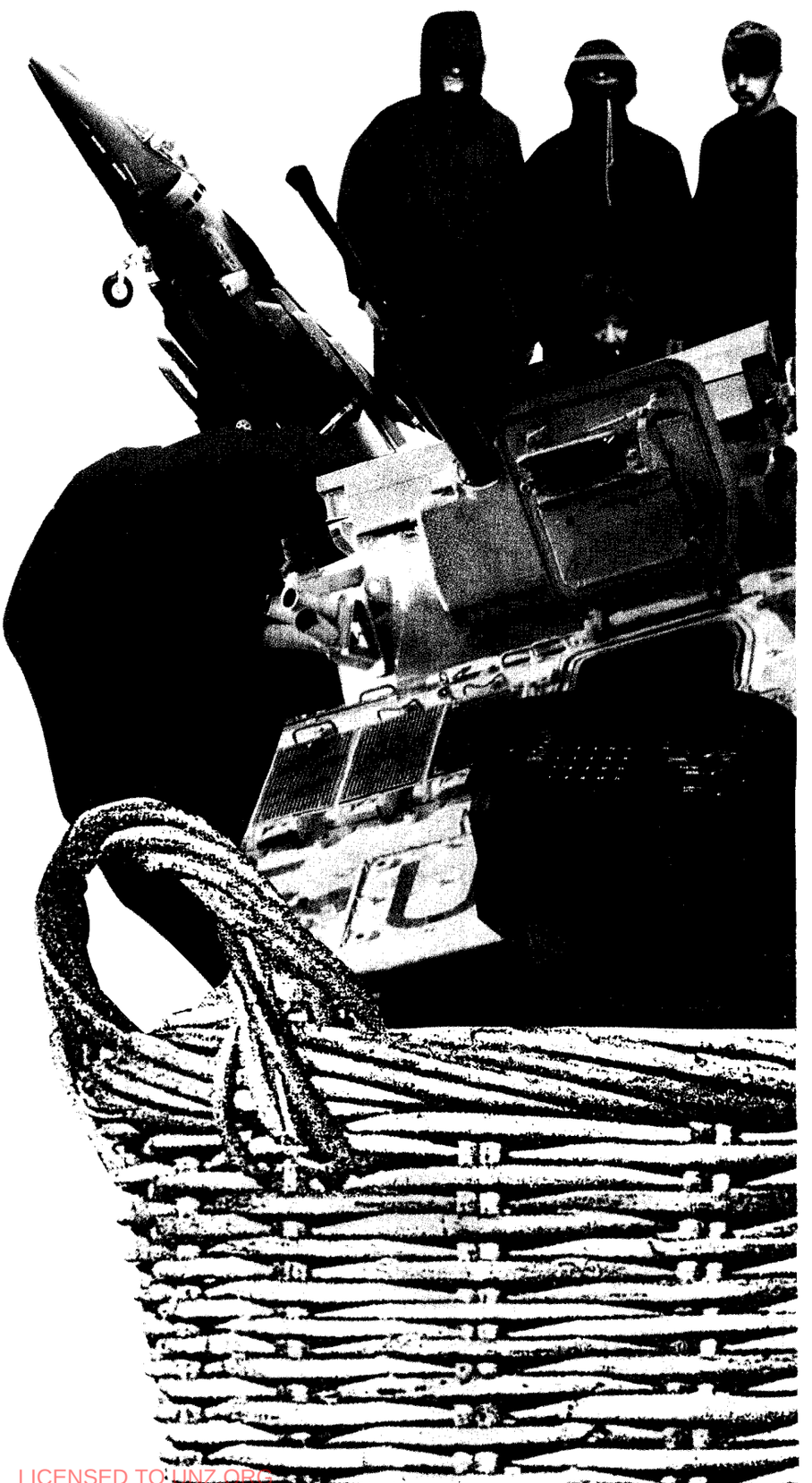
Britain is second only to the US in supplying weaponry to the world—hard selling is the key. **Nyta Mann** files a dispatch from the front line at this year's major arms fair

Lethal shop of horrors



It was the military equivalent of a slow day at the Ideal Home Exhibition. Muzak wafted around the display stands from promotional videos; company representatives prowled up and down the aisles, itching to deliver their sales pitch. "Window shoppers today, that's all," muttered a bored exhibitor as he polished his anti-aircraft guns. I paused to admire the camouflage netting draped artistically over the Tiger attack helicopter, when a salesman suddenly materialised by my side. "Go ahead madam, sit in it!" he urged. "Surprisingly comfy, isn't it?" This was preview day at the Royal Navy and Army Equipment Exhibition 1993—the media-friendly name given to Britain's regular arms fair.

According to the government, it's boom time for British arms sales, with a record-breaking £5.2 billion worth of military exports offloaded in 1992, making us the second biggest arms exporter after the US. It looks like Sir Alan Thomas, head of the government's Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), should be getting his £30,000 performance-related bonus again this year. Held every two years in Aldershot, this government-approved showcase of more than 200 companies is the biggest platform for the defence industry to tout its wares in front of a specially invited international audience. The guest-list is confidential and the public is not allowed in, but the hefty "exhibition" catalogue lists virtually everything the self-respecting repressive regime could want.

With the real punters arriving the following day, when the exhibition would be closed to all except potential buyers, the firms present were brushing up their hard-sell on that day's visitors. Company directors patrolled the arena, bearing down on half-interested stragglers. Sales reps lurked among the bullet-adorned rockery installations, waiting to intercept passers-by. Like the most hardened shop assistants, they were undeterred by pleas of "I'm just looking".

Loitering by the grenades counter, I fell victim to an ambush by the Royal Ordnance salesman. "Ah, *New Statesman* is it?" he exclaimed, peering at the obligatory press pass on my lapel. "I know what *you'd* like!" With a flourish, he produced the latest model in ecologically sound smoke bombs. "See these? The old models were made from phosphorus, which is a terribly toxic thing, but we've replaced that with a non-pollutant now. Much better, don't you think?"

I took evasive action and headed for the *real* arms at the British Aerospace airborne explosives department, featuring the 1,000-lb Mark 20 general-purpose high explosive bomb. "I see you're interested in one of our staple sellers," said the man from BAe, pouncing as I hovered over a row of them. He proudly patted the outer casing of one and enthused over what a good war it had. "It's used against airfields and things like that. Did you see those videos during the Gulf war, where the bomb goes in the hotel ventilation shaft? That was the Mark 20," he beamed. Hotel? What about the airfields? "Well all right, it's an all-rounder bomb, really."

As with all the most exclusive establishments, there were no price tags in sight. "It's not a secret, as such. It just depends on how many you want," explained the man in

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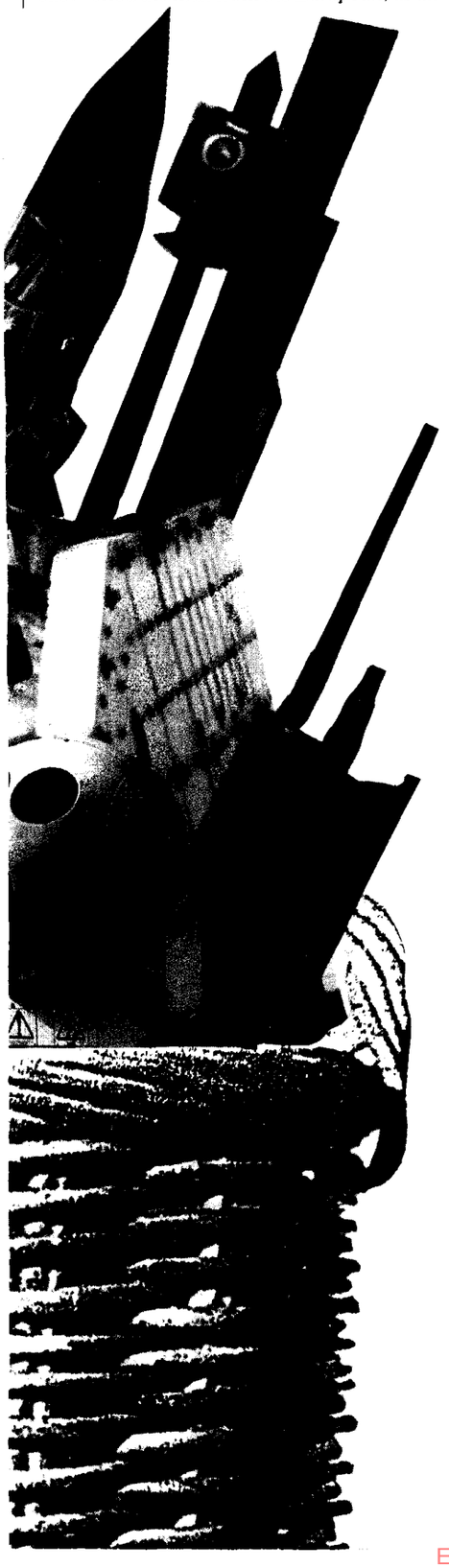
charge of the new, improved howitzer. "Bulk buying makes a difference, you see." He coyly refused to speculate which foreign governments might be expected when the exhibition officially opened. "Oh, I expect there may be representatives from the Middle East," was all he would venture.

Things were more aggressive in the half-scale warship, parked nearby. Here, bathed in a dim red light for that authentic war-movie feel, the ill-disciplined press corps had surrendered to superior forces and was playing with brightly lit sonar screens and guidance systems simulators, under the indulgent eye of the naval weapons attendants. "I've hit one!" cried the man from the *European*, as an underwater missile struck an enemy vessel.



Over at one of the few "personal equipment" stalls, the man in charge of all-weather camping gear was feeling neglected. "Mere clothes aren't as sexy as missiles," he grumbled. His meticulously arranged racks of combat clothing and range of drink canisters had so far remained undisturbed, losing out in the battle against the serious hardware on offer. "The trade visitors are at the end of the week, mind you, and we get our share of interest then." He brightened up as a fellow-exhibitor arrived to discuss the merits of the "latest developments in the sleeping bag".

The Scott Inquiry into military sales to Iraq describes DESO staff as being "excessively enthusiastic and wayward" salesmen. I could see why when, emerging from the demonstration Field-Base Kitchen, I was caught in a pincer movement by a firefighting equipment representative and a laser gun-sights dealer. If this was any indication, how could even the most casual shopper resist the "everything must go" atmosphere? There was even a round-trip to Portsmouth laid on to view a few brand new, surplus stock submarines, no reasonable offer refused.

"We've been hit pretty badly. It's a declining market, you know. This is just an effective way of showcasing what we produce, and you must remember that it's a responsible, highly regulated market," protested one exhibitor having a rest in the coffee bar. He trotted out the defence industry's two favourite justifications for selling arms to almost anyone who'll take them: "After all, there are jobs at stake—and if we don't sell our products, there's always someone else who'll gladly take our place. Anyway, as everyone knows, we don't sell defence equipment to just anybody—we're not allowed to."

I asked him what he thought about "Iraqgate", and whether he worried about possibly being one of the Matrix-Churchill mugginses of the future. "Well, I suppose that's an interesting question, but it doesn't apply. Not to my firm, anyway—and not to any other firm I know of, either."

Flanked by two lavishly braided members of the military top brass, chief arms salesman Sir Alan himself batted away such unhelpful questions more rumbustiously at the official afternoon briefing. Why did our "open" government refuse to reveal which foreign buyers were invited to attend the giant sale? "We have to keep proper confidences," he gravely explained. Why did DESO so actively encourage third-world countries—which last year purchased an estimated three-quarters of all Britain's defence exports—to spend their resources on arms rather than basic needs? "We're not in the business of selling defence export equipment to people who can't afford to pay for it," he chuckled. What about British military equipment finding its way into Saddam Hussein's armoury? "I'm not sure I can express any regret about what you say," he apologised. Didn't he at least regret his own department's role in arming Iraq? "I'm afraid that's arrant nonsense, sir," he chided. The consummate Whitehall official, he shuffled off every query admirably, without revealing a glimpse of the unsavoury *actualité*. John Major must be proud of him.

INFLUENCES

ROBERT WYATT
Songwriter and musician

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
Haven't got any beliefs, just certain loyalties . . . oh, all right then, Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem and one song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
May I dissociate myself from the word "everyone"? Ta.
Film: *Spartacus*.
Book: *Year 501—The Conquest Continues* by Noam Chomsky.
Play: The odd Noh play.
Song: "Worship" by Alfie Benge.
Music: I listen to foreign dialects so as to hear the message of the sound itself; muezzin as musician.

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?
Dick Palmer, a lovely, modest scientist who helped my mum write *How Things Began* for school broadcasting when I was but a nipper.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
Outside a concert hall, watching an American policeman batter a young Hendrix fan's head against the wall. I kept losing my concentration during the subsequent concert.

Which political figure, living or dead, do you most admire?
Here's how I'd say grace before a feast: "For what we are about to receive, may the workers of the world make us truly grateful." Oh, all right then. Dead: Archbishop Romero. Abroad: Jean Bertrand Aristide. English: Bernie Grant.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
The day Angolan local heroes of the MPLA, with support from a couple of Cuban defenders and a Soviet goalie, demolished regional champions Apartheid Unita'd.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
Immigration controls.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
I wouldn't burden anybody with my trust, just my affection (but I bet my son and daughter-in-law are pretty good nurses).

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
There's a genteel, faded charm to the pageantry of parliament, but isn't it time we got a proper royal family? I suggest the innately regal Mrs and Mr Harold Pinter.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
Laws against state terrorism to be clarified, to dispel the "but it's all right if you're one of us" odour.

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Bosnia has been thoroughly sold up the river by the latest "peace" plan, says **Branka Magas**, and the British government has been one of the main conspirators

Bosnia: a very British betrayal

Not so many weeks ago, at a semi-public meeting, a high-ranking Foreign Office official speaking in defence of doing nothing about the war of agression against Bosnia-Hercegovina confided to his audience: "The Balkans have always been an alien part of Europe." So too was Czechoslovakia damned for being "a faraway country of which we know little".

Other countries, though initially sharing Britain's view on the desirability of Yugoslavia's integrity, were induced by the war to change their minds. Germany pressed for recognition of the republics endangered by Serbian aggression, the United States advocated military intervention, even Francois Mitterrand visited Sarajevo under seige.

Britain alone has maintained an implacably passive stance, preferring aggression to run its course. Faced with critics, the Foreign Office line has been to protest ignorance (until caught out by the journalists), innocence ("What can we do if they want to kill each other?"), and even injured indignation ("Why criticise us, when we have done so much more than anybody else?").

Yet, as a state with a historic influence in the Balkans, a leading member of the European Community and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Britain has had a major role in the shaping of western policy. Faced with the break-up of Yugoslavia and a bloody war, its imagination could not stretch beyond resumption of a traditional anti-German stance.

The resistance of Yugoslavia's constituent republics to Belgrade's hegemonic designs in the 1989-91 period was denounced as "secessionism". When Serbia attacked Slovenia in June 1991, the aggression was immediately portrayed as an "internal Yugoslav affair". As the aggressor moved in turn against Croatia and Bosnia, blame for the war continued to be evenly spread. Aggression was redefined as "civil war", justifying economic sanctions and an arms embargo on all republics, victims and aggressors alike.

It is true that economic sanctions were subsequently lifted for all but Serbia and Montenegro, but little was in any case done to enforce them. If Serbia is now facing an economic near-collapse, this is due more to the cost of war (including military and economic support for conquered areas in Croatia and Bosnia) than to sanctions. Greater Serbia, today hiding behind the name of "Yugoslavia", albeit not an internationally recognised state, has been allowed an embassy in London, just as Great Britain has maintained an embassy in Belgrade.

By contrast, no British ambassador was ever appointed to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, despite recognition being granted in April of last year.

If you must ask the Foreign Office for an explanation, it will first deny any bias and in the last resort appeal to "realism". Here "realism" means not just recognising a *fait accompli*, but doing all you can to make it happen in the first place. Six months into the war, when a third of Croatia has already been laid waste by Serbian armour, Britain voted in the Security Council in favour of maintaining an arms embargo against all Yugoslavia's successor states in full knowledge that this enormously increased the chances of Serbia's outright victory.

The Foreign Office's "realism" means not just recognising a fait accompli, but helping to make it happen

The Security Council vote was in flagrant contradiction of Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides member-states with the right to individual and collective defence when faced with outside aggression, Bosnia-Hercegovina, the next target of Serbian aggression, was repeatedly to evoke Article 51, to no avail. The British government, of course, knew when it cast its vote, of Serbia's designs on Bosnia-Hercegovina. But it has consistently been the fiercest opponent of both the Bosnian state's right to self-defence and any UN intervention on its behalf.

At the time of its presidency of the EC, in August 1992, Britain hosted a London Conference on Bosnia (two-thirds of which was by then in Serbian hands). But who now remembers the principles enunciated by that gathering, or any of its concrete resolutions? The conference, after all, was little more than window-dressing, pending an abject surrender to what Lord Owen likes to call "realities on the ground".

The *Daily Telegraph*, whose leaders are often a fair indicator of what the Foreign Office thinks, was by now regularly writing off Bosnia and, while bemoaning the tragedy that had befallen its people, sternly warning against any action that might end it. Small wonder that when, in December 1992, the UN General Assembly voted to recommend to the Security Council that Bosnia-Hercegovina be exempted from the arms embargo, Britain should have opposed this. Faced with growing outrage at home, the Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary preferred to talk of "centuries of ethnic hatred" (despite all evidence to the contrary), praise Britain's humanitarian effort and stress the danger to its soldiers in the event of a military intervention.

British soldiers on the ground became a chief argument against all moves that would make unnecessary the cumbersome, expensive and inadequate delivery of humanitarian aid to a population whose main problem was that it was being killed, maimed and driven into exile by sustained Serbian bombardment.

Of all European states, Britain alone has had the honour of providing the EC component of the EC/UN "peace mediating" duo. In the case of first Croatia, then Bosnia, such mediation has, from the start, been premised on the desirability of ethnic partition.

As Christopher Hitchens reminded us recently, the British have always excelled at the shabby art of partitioning. Lord Carrington was chiefly responsible for the Cutilheiro Plan, which on the eve of recognition of Bosnia's independence proposed—in deference to Belgrade's wishes—that the country be carved up on an ethnic basis. When Bosnian delegates were summoned to Lisbon in March 1992, they discovered that Mr Cutilheiro already had a prepared map for this in his pocket. To give the devil his due, Lord Carrington did resign his post in August 1992, when it became impossible to ignore the fact that "ethnic cleansing"—mass expulsion of population from coveted areas by the deliberate use of terror—was the other side of the map-making coin.

For the EC/UN cartographers, the chief problem has always been how to square the pretence of safeguarding Bosnia's territorial integrity with acceptance of "realities on the ground". The Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP), the last gesture in the direction of international legality, turned out to be little more than a public-relations exercise. Despite the hard sell in Europe and the US, it was abandoned without even a whimper. In the absence of any attempt to reconvene the London Conference, it now became unclear what Lord Owen's new brief was or who he served.

Whether VOPP was abandoned because Serbia did not like it, or on grounds of cost, it had already served a key purpose. With its generosity to the anti-Bosnian schemers in Zagreb, it brought about a final rupture between the Bosnian Croat forces and the government army, providing one more apparent proof of how Bosnia's population could not live together, one more argument for partition.

But the main success of the "only show in town" was the Bosnian president's signature

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on a plan for partition of his country. After this, it has been downhill all the way. Once Owen and his staff, seconded from the Foreign Office, drew up their plan for a "Union of Bosnian Republics it was as inevitable that Milosevic and Tudjman would be welcomed in Geneva as peacemakers, while Izetbegovic would henceforth be treated as an obstacle to peace.

The two proponents of ethnic purity could now rightfully claim to be in tune with western policy, against all their detractors at home and abroad. The Croation opposition, which has always opposed the partition of Bosnia-Hercegovina, was effectively disarmed. And no wonder the tiny Serbian democratic opposition should now have denounced Lord Owen as a "war criminal". For, unlike Cyrus Vance, who excused himself from the Bosnian job after the infamous Washington meeting in late May 1993 at which VOPP was finally dropped, Owen has soldiered on—even claiming the mantle of defender of Bosnian Muslim interests.

In Geneva, the alternation of heavy artillery pounding Bosnian cities with quieter starvation tactics finds its equivalent in the alternately crude and subtle forms of pressure exerted by the representatives of the "international community" against the delegation of a state now treated as the main foe only because of its refusal to commit suicide. In this climate of extortion, any reference to popular mandates, universal principles, international conventions and charters, the EC's original positions, London Conference decisions, or UN resolutions, is treated as an outright provocation.

The only moment of light relief was supplied by Owen's disappointment when his ruse of inviting opposition parties to participate in the negotiations—in the hope of undermining the Bosnian delegation—backfired almost immediately, since the opposition proved if anything more recalcitrant than their president.

The rest is grim indeed. Invited to Geneva for talks decisive for the fate of their country, the Bosnian delegation found themselves having to fight for what should have been their most elementary entitlements—down to proper office space, fax and photocopying facilities or even access to women's lavatories (the Bosnian delegation is the only one to contain women).

More substantial problems have included Owen's calculated rudeness ; the absence of all protocol; the ad-hoc daily agenda; the long hours of meaningless negotiations designed only to wear down Bosnian resistance; crucial documents being produced for instant decision, often only in English; key maps proferred only as black-white photocopies; press briefings by Owen's staff that speak of progress where there is none.

What kind of progress has really been made can best be judged by "the final map": a near-replica of Milosevic's preference. The EC/UN mediators have got the Bosnians where they want them: reduced to a mad scramble for territory, devoid of ethnic or economic logic.

The territory, in any case, is a devastated land. Most towns and villages in Bosnia-Hercegovina have been reduced to rubble. The vast majority of bridges, roads and railway lines have been destroyed, factories blown up or looted, fields and forests peppered with anti-personnel mines. The carving out of three mono-ethnic statelets from the body of an organically fused Bosnian society plays havoc with geography: separating mountains from valleys; breaking up towns and cutting them off from their rural hinterlands; severing links between industrial zones and their manpower and mineral resources; and slicing up the communications system.

Anton Kazlauciunas

It also plays havoc with the actual density and distribution of the Bosnian population. The Serb and Croat "republics", whose core zones in northwestern Bosnia and western Hercegovina respectively were already sparsely populated, will end up—thanks to population flight and "ethnic cleansing"—with an additional human deficit. By contrast, the proposed central republic, which embraces the area of greatest population density, will become even more crowded as it becomes the only home to hundreds of thousands of Muslims driven from their homes elsewhere.

To believe that the planned Gothic structure—of international supervision: UN-patrolled corridors; projected new tunnels, viaducts and bypasses; access to a few kilometres of Adriatic coast or river shore—will allow the economy to regenerate in any part of Bosnia, to the extent of securing a bare minimum of self-sufficiency, is to believe in miracles. The lip service paid to return of refugees and minority rights is a cynical PR exercise. The Bosnia emerging from Geneva is doomed to a future of hunger and violence, a source of permanent instability in the Balkans.

The west is now presiding over a settlement that will break Bosnia's economic and social backbone for good, grafting its severed limbs upon the alien bodies of the neighbouring states. The butchery is being carried out in the name of peace. The Geneva peace, however, not only ensures continued war in this part of Europe, but also buries the collective sense of security won in the war against fascism not so long ago, and reaffirmed in the principles of Helsinki.

Europe, by passively watching territories being annexed, ancient cities destroyed and whole communities threatened with genocide, has consigned the watchword "never again", upon which whole generations were raised, to the dustbin of history. Once again European borders can be redrawn by force in the name of racial purity and "realities on the ground" be legitimised as a basis for peace.

We are, it seems, being condemned to repeat history. On a recent visit to Geneva, I saw in front of the Palais des Nations—formerly League of Nations, now United Nations, HQ where Bosnia's surrender is being forced—Swiss and Bosnian demonstrators carrying a banner saying "The UN is Dead". They should know, for they are the last Europeans.

Branka Magas is author of "The Destruction of Yugoslavia", Verso, £12.95, and a member of the Alliance to Save Bosnia-Hercegovina

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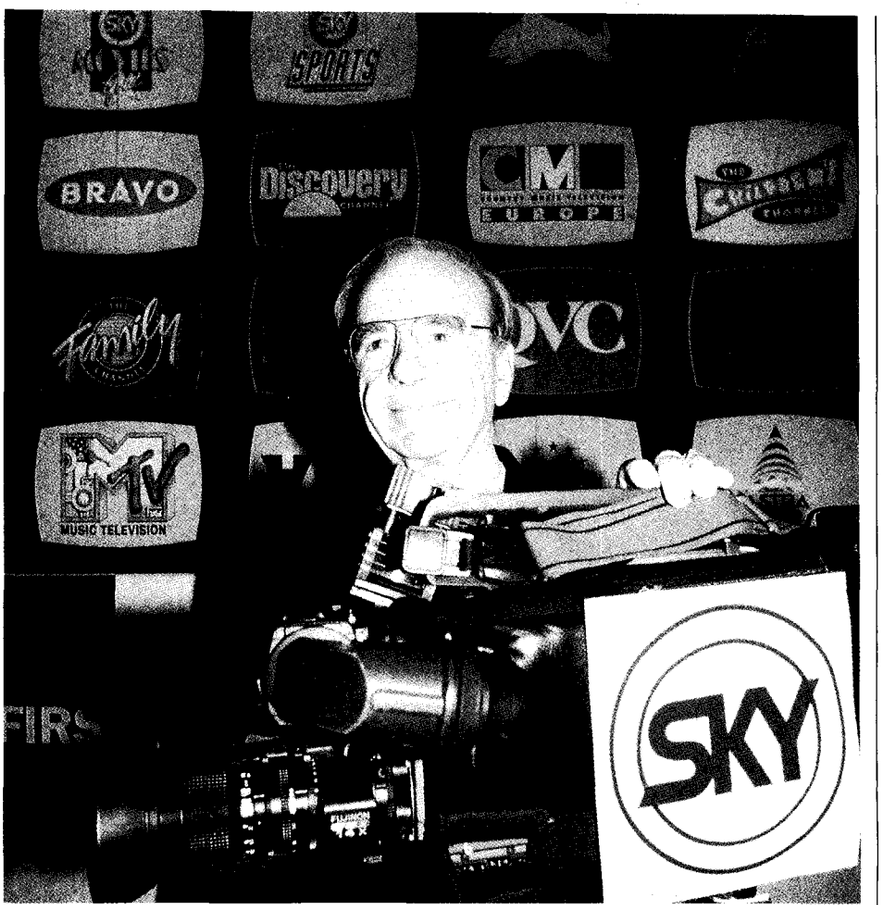

Press Association

Prince of darkness or forward-looking technological innovator? **Roy Greenslade** considers the enigmatic career of Rupert Murdoch, the man we love to hate

Sky is not the limit

Everyone tends to ask the same question about Rupert Murdoch: why does he do it? People are fascinated by the motives of a man who cannot seem to stop doing deals. When will he have enough, they ask? What is his real ambition? Is there a sinister, hidden agenda? Is he poised for world domination?

In the absence of explanation, there is mystery. And then it is but a short step to the creation of a mythology. So this shy, remote figure has been demonised: the Dirty Digger, the Prince of Darkness, the devil incarnate, monster, debaser of culture, profiteer, bogeyman.

But scorn is cheap, the language of the playground, obscuring us from seeing reality. Nor is it helpful to hazard guesses at what makes Murdoch tick. Having read a half-dozen biographies that purport to do so, I note that none of them has discovered the psychological impulses for his actions.

That is not to say that Murdoch is not an interesting man. Just the reverse. But if we wish to understand him, rather than denigrate him, then we must look at what he has achieved and why. What were, and are, the economic forces that have shaped his building of a global media empire?

In the quarter of a century since he arrived from Australia to buy the *News of the World*, the collection and transmission of news has been transformed by technological innovation. Murdoch's purchases, mergers and launches—culminating in last week's trumpeting of a bewildering array of overlapping deals—reflect that change.

By any standards, the list of what his companies now own or control is awesome. Newspapers first: his five British national newspapers together amount to 34 per cent of all copies sold and include the biggest-selling daily and Sunday tabloids. In Australia, there are more than 100 papers accounting for 80 per cent of the market. In America, he has two raucous tabloids in New York and Boston.

Elsewhere, there are papers in Hungary, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Hong Kong, though he is negotiating to sell the *South China Morning Post* as I write. In addition, he owns magazines on three continents, and the giant book publishing house, HarperCollins.

In Hollywood, his headquarters nowadays, he runs 20th Century Fox film studios and Fox TV, America's fourth largest network. In Britain, he owns half of BSkyB, the satellite broadcasting company, which is run by one of his most trusted lieutenants. He has just bought Star TV in Hong Kong for $525 million, a station with a potential Asian audience of three billion.

He has also recently taken a stake in the Australian TV network that makes the poular soap *Home And Away*. He hopes soon to launch his Fox cable TV network in Latin America and has also gone into partnership to make TV programmes with Mexico's leading TV entrepreneur.

There is still more. After a couple of years in a bank-imposed straitjacket, Murdoch is making the most of his new-found freedom. In what is potentially the most lucrative move of all, he is exploring with British Telecom the possibility of exploiting "the digital super highways of the future" by combining satellite technology with telephone networks to provide TV to every home with a phone.

Murdoch is involved in a joint venture in Germany to set up pay TV; Sky News is soon to expand from 33 European countries into Africa; and he is also taking part in a sweeping plan to develop a common digital satellite system throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas.

In announcing his latest television ventures at a glittering reception, Murdoch could not contain his delight, speaking of it as "the most exciting challenge in broadcasting in the world, with a reach of more than two-thirds of the entire planet".

His speeches and statements were peppered with the new double-barrelled lexicon of the multi-media world: using multi-purpose fibre optic cable delivery systems, we can expect multi-national, multi-channel, multi-package television.

It is not surprising that Murdoch was enjoying himself. As he observed: "Time does actually fly." Four years ago, he had no stake in British television. Three years ago, he was struggling to avoid financial disaster. Now, at the age of 62, he is set fair for the 21st century.

But it was a totally separate announcement by Murdoch's British print company at Wapping, News International, that provided the major clue to his current corporate strategy. The *Times* reduced its cover price by 15p, under-cutting its broadsheet rivals and even selling at 2p less than the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*.

It was this decision, occurring simultaneously with the revelation of Murdoch's bid to be head-postmaster of the global village, that prompted fierce criticism. The *Independent* immediately viewed itself as the target in a price war it might not survive. The Labour Party immediately called for an Office of Fair Trading investigation.

Murdoch's disingenuous justification for the price cut—that he was helping the public and the industry—angered other rivals. Even Murdoch admirer Conrad Black, press tycoon, owner of the Telegraph group, with newspapers in North America, Australia and Israel, said: "While it is entertaining to see

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Rupert masquerading as a Robin Hood of the media, friend of the frugal consumer, it is scarcely believable."

An equivocal leader in the *Daily Mail*, not wishing to denigrate a man it clearly admires, also took him to task: "How ironic it would be—and unhealthy—if he now started to use his own monopoly powers to destroy other newspapers."

The *Guardian*'s Hugo Young was also upset. "The *Times* proving unable to sell on editorial quality alone, this beneficent anti-mogul . . . uses his corporate weight to see if underpricing will do the trick," he wrote. And that weight stems from "cross-ownership . . . of newspapers and television".

Just because Murdoch has got in early and can boast of his innovations, this is no guarantee of success

Indeed it does, and this goes to the heart of Murdoch's new motto. Newspapers are dead! Long live television! He has recognised that although British newspapers will go on being read in their millions into the next century, they are on a long, slow, inexorable decline.

Is it so surprising that, with newspaper sales falling in every western country and with greater numbers of people naming their main source of news as television, newspaper owners, providers of news, should not move into new forms of media?

Confronted by such a situation, what is a reasonable manufacturer—responsible, that is, to shareholders, staff, customers—supposed to do? Murdoch, a restless seeker after ideas, seized on the potential of new television technology, embracing the news and entertainment sources that threaten the future of his newspapers.

Murdoch could have turned his back or taken a different point of view. Conrad Black, for instance, urges caution, arguing that the "prospect for newspapers is in general more promising than for television". In the short term, he may be right, but Murdoch's logic is based on an analysis of longer run trends.

Labour MP Gerald Kaufman believes that: "With or without Murdoch, technological change is going to transform what we can watch on our TV sets—and that change is coming fast . . . Murdoch is simply being practical and prudent."

This is an unpopular point of view in the Labour Party, where most concern is levelled at the way Murdoch has been able to avoid media regulations designed to restrict cross-ownership. In fact, as throughout history, technology is rendering old rules obsolete: the former corporate and geographical boundaries are well and truly penetrated by satellites.

But Murdoch's manoeuvres to beat the restrictions reflect his desire not to lose out to a whole raft of companies—such as Ted Turner's Cable News Network, Reuters, Reed-Elsevier, Thorn-EMI and PolyGram—rapidly pursuing similar aims.

For instance, another stakeholder in BSkyB, Pearson—owner of the *Financial Times*, Penguin Books and loser to Murdoch in the bid for Star TV—is committed to expansion. Managing director Frank Barlow says candidly: "We don't really care which area of the media we are in. We are more concerned to follow the market."

This attitude, and the publicity hype of Murdoch's announcements, conceals another truth. Just because Murdoch has got in early and can boast of the technological innovations he has harnessed, this is not a guarantee of success. He remains a pioneer.

For example, there is no certainty that his BSkyB initiative will pay off. Is there sufficient enthusiasm among potential subscribers to pay £300 for a dish plus £19.99 a month—almost three times the current BBC licence fee—to watch 16 channels? Indeed, will existing viewers be happy to pay for what they get free at present? His Asian purchase is also a gamble because Star TV has yet to make a profit.

In a recent circular, analysts at stockbrokers S G Warburg concluded: "Multi-media is fast reshaping the worlds of entertainment, education and information", but "there remain more uncertainties than certainties".

But, lest anyone get the wrong idea, I am not writing in praise of Murdoch's commercial chutzpah, merely outlining the rational economic reasons for it.

And it is difficult not to take issue with his little joke about being on the verge of a post-media tycoon world: "I must add (with maybe a tiny touch of regret) that this technology has also liberated people from the once powerful media barons. The days when a few newspaper publishers could agree to keep an entire nation ignorant of an important event are long gone."

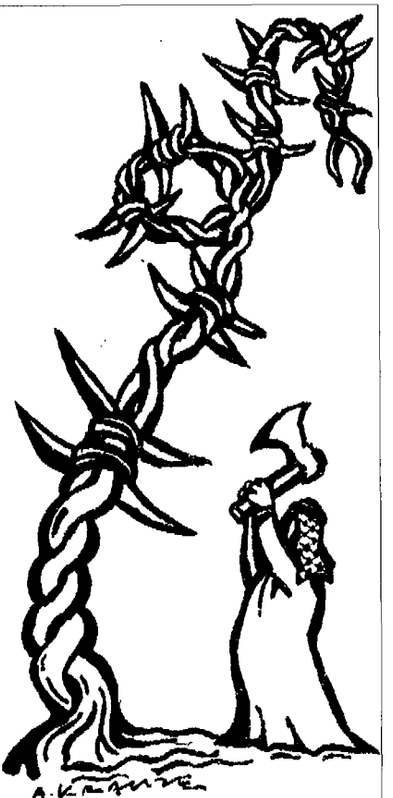
Ah yes, of an event itself. But what of the *way* an event is reported? What about the cultural and ideological domination that can be exerted from centralised media controlled by a single company? That may be far-fetched, but Murdoch must recognise that the continuous purveying of a political line, backed up by newspapers, is a frightening vision.

This is why his reasoned response to the decline of newspapers and rise of global television technology has another dimension. In any other industry, Murdoch's expansion into related business might be uncontroversial. After all, the history of capitalism is one of entrepreneurs constantly seeking out new products to replace old. But the information industry is qualitatively different from the manufacture of bars of soap or baked beans.

Murdoch may have hurdled all the current regulations in the need to follow his technological hunch. But all governments need to consider the possibility of setting up an international authority to prevent the emergence of a global news monopoly.

In the face of this giant task, the Labour Party's call for a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report in Britain is much too little, much too late.

Roy Greenslade is a former editor of the "Daily Mirror"



Tearing Off A Strip

For Gaza shall be forsaken . . . woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coasts (Zephaniah 2.4,5)

What occupies us chiefly
Is how this story ends:
For no one's spoken, briefly,
Of settlements, amends.

"Home" is hopeless theory,
And "family" has died;
Our hearts and heads are weary,
Which is how we're occupied.

Our land is like a plaster
On an aggravated toe;
What occupies its master
Is how quick the itch will go.

When thieves return the pieces
Which have occupied their haul,
Does this mean the feeling ceases
Of a robbery at all?

Here the Philistines were finished
To their scripture's holy roar:
Does the way they were diminished
Still preoccupy their law?

We live behind the wire.
Does this mean we are a nation?
Are we filled with new desire?
—See, we have no occupation.

Bill Greenwell

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One in three local councils are "hung"; no party has overall control. **John Stewart** and **Chris Game** find the local parties busy discovering new ways of running things

Labour lets it all hang out

Labour's local government standing is statistically higher today than at any time since reorganisation in the mid-1970s. For the first time, the party controls all four principal local authority associations. It has more councillors across Great Britain (some 9,300) than do the Conservatives (7,900), and majorities on more councils (165 to the Tories' 99) than ever before.

Yet, for every Labour council, there is also one with no single party in overall control: 163—or nearly one in three—authorities that are technically hung or balanced. As Michael Caine might conjecture, this is not knowledge vouchsafed to many.

These hung authorities have been developing a new politics: new ways of working, new forms of administration, new approaches to budget- and policy-making. But they have been doing so almost unnoticed.

The little serious media attention they receive tends to be confined to two sets of circumstances, both potentially misleading. First, there are the four-yearly English and Welsh county council elections which, in 1985 and again this year, certainly did produce an exceptionally large crop of hung councils.

As initially reported in these pages by Martin Rosenbaum (28 May 1993), there are currently 26 hung counties in England, plus the two Independent-dominated Welsh counties of Dyfed and Gwynedd. The varied forms of administrative arrangements that are now operating in these counties are summarised in the accompanying table: six minority administrations, ten power-sharing deals/arrangements/agreements/partnerships (but never openly acknowledged "pacts"!), and ten party spokesperson or "no administration" systems.

The eight non-Conservative power-sharing deals, in particular, have attracted much attention, not least from the respective parties' national headquarters. We too will return to them shortly. At this point, we would merely emphasise that these 28 English and Welsh counties are neither a new phenomenon, nor do they constitute more than a modest fraction of the total number of hung authorities.

The 1993 elections contained more than their share of historic results, with counties like Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey and West Sussex losing their century-long Conservative dominance. But 12 of the 28 were already hung *before* the 1993 elections, most of them since at least 1985. There are, too, plenty of examples outside the counties: a quarter of the 36 metropolitan districts, four London boroughs and, arithmetically at least, over a third of English shire districts.

The other circumstances in which hung or balanced authorities may get noticed are in a tightly contested general election campaign. Can we not, by examining these councils, get some insights into what might happen in the event of a hung parliament? It is a seductive idea, but one with rather limited mileage.

The constitutional and institutional requirements of central and local government are too different, the roles of ministers and the responsibilities of civil servants are too dissimilar from those of committee chairs and local government officers, for there to be many *direct* or immediately applicable lessons to be learnt. Local government's "no administration" approach, for a start, is not a feasible option for a system requiring a parliamentarily accountable executive.

Hung councils do merit more serious study, but in their own right, not as mere parliamentary surrogates. They should be seen less as predictive institutional models than as settings in which previously dyed-in-the-wool party adversaries can work pragmatically, productively and inventively together when a council's voting mathematics demand it. The lessons are more in the approach than the detailed outcomes.

One of the greatest virtues of a system of genuinely devolved local government is its learning capacity: its practitioners' ability to learn from the initiatives and mistakes of others. There is considerable evidence, even in our summary table, that a fair amount of learning has taken place in the past few years.

In the 1980s, when many authorities became hung for the first time, each party was inclined to make its own characteristic mistakes, as described in *The Politics of Hung Authorities* by S Deach and J Steward (Macmillan, 1992). Labour's characteristic mistake, especially as the largest party, was to pursue a "governmental strategy", arguing that it would take committee chairs only if it were guaranteed a majority on all committees. When, unsurprisingly, the other parties rejected this proposal, which is what usually happened, the party would adopt an oppositional stance, rejecting the positive opportunities offered by the hung situation.

The characteristic Conservative mistake was the precise reverse. Several Tory groups were prepared to form administrations without securing any guarantees at all from the other parties—apparently assuming that, despite the changed arithmetic, they could continue to behave as the "natural party of government". They would then find them-

Administrative arrangements in the 26 English hung counties

Largest party	Minority administration		Power-sharing		No administration (spokesperson system: ad hoc/rotating chairs)
	Largest party	Not largest party	Cons-LD/non-Labour	Lab-LD/non-Cons	
Conservative		Norfolk	Surrey	Hereford & Worcester Lincolnshire Shropshire	Cambridgeshire Kent Oxfordshire
Labour	Cumbria Warwickshire		Cheshire	Essex Suffolk	Avon Bedfordshire Hertfordshire Leicestershire
Liberal Democrats	Devon Dorset West Sussex			Berkshire East Sussex Hampshire	Gloucestershire North Yorkshire Wiltshire

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selves defeated in committee and having to take public responsibility for policies of which they disapproved.

The Liberal Democrats, or their predecessors, often tried simply to overplay their hand. They would assume that, occupying the central position, they could transfer their support from one party to another, and, if they were the largest party, hold the chairs without challenge, since the other parties would not unite against them. But, taunted in this way, the other parties would and often did.

Mostly, the parties have quickly learned from their mistakes and developed new and more realistic ways of working together. Sets of conventions are agreed, governing inter-party relations and contact with officers. Weekly meetings of the chief executive with either the party group leaders or their committee spokespersons help foster agreement and progress. Perhaps most significantly, many authorities have abandoned the idea of their having to have an identifiable administration at all. Instead of being in a position of considerable executive power and influence, the job of committee chair becomes one of simply chairing the committee meeting: a responsibility determined either at the meeting itself or shared out among the parties on a rotational basis.

Other authorities have developed almost every possible permutation of chair-sharing arrangement, involving two, three and sometimes four parties. In a few, like Berkshire, parties have sought to negotiate at least tentative policy agreements as well as administrative deals. There have even been pre-electoral "understandings"—albeit strictly unofficial—resulting in Conservative candidates being opposed by only one opponent, rather than two.

Local politicians have thus been learning new modes of operating, with which the national parties have found difficulty keeping pace. Labour Party guidelines used to state that Labour groups should not share committee chairs or enter into formal pacts with any party to control the council. These guidelines were amended this year, but the pressure from some county Labour groups has forced the NEC to give special approval to the Labour-Liberal Democrat power-sharing arrangements agreed in East Sussex, Hampshire, Hereford and Worcester, Lincolnshire, Shropshire and Suffolk.

This is surely a sensible response. These are counties in which Labour could never seriously hope to gain an overall majority, and it would be foolish for the party, as well as harsh on its own local councillors, to deny itself the real power and influence that can result from such interparty arrangements. Labour cannot afford to forget that its MPs now have far less experience of the politics of power than do its councillors. While detailed forms of local administration may not be readily translatable to the national arena, the experience of running a hung or balanced administration could well prove a valuable resource in a future parliament.

John Stewart is professor and Chris Game is lecturer at the Institute of Local Government Studies at the University of Birmingham. Details of the symposium British Democracy: Condition critical? are on page 32

John Major is the most unpopular prime minister ever, say the polls. But he could still be re-elected, explains **Simon Braunholtz**

Poll position

Polls confirm that the Conservative government has plumbed unprecedented depths of unpopularity—MORI's July poll for the *Times* found 80 per cent dissatisfied with its performance. John Major's standing has been in decline since he took over the premiership in 1990, and he is the most unpopular prime minister since records began.

Is this a symptom of a wider public perception about politicians?

Gallup recently asked people how Britain has changed over a generation. More than seven in ten (72 per cent) say Britain was well-governed 20 to 30 years ago, but fewer than a third (30 per cent) think it still is. Three-quarters of those questioned say the British parliament used to be something to be proud of, but only a third (35 per cent) think it now is.

But how far is the political system, as opposed to particular politicians, at fault? And would changing the system—through proportional representation, European integration, and so on—improve matters?

Here the polling evidence is less straightforward. The MORI/Joseph Rowntree "state of the nation" survey in 1991 found the proportion of the public saying the system of government was in need of a "great deal of improvement" had increased to nearly a quarter, up from the 14 per cent found in a 1973 poll.

Voters relate more to concrete issues than to abstract questions about the "system". People in the "state of the nation" survey who said the political system needed improvement focused their suggestions on abolishing the poll tax and improving the National Health Service rather than on fundamental constitutional change.

When they are presented to voters, specific options for constitutional reform attract considerable backing. Supporters of proportional representation (PR) outnumber opponents by around two to one, for example. But there is at the same time ambivalence about coalitions, and MORI has consistently found that around half of the electorate admit either that they have never heard of PR or that they don't know what it is.

Which of these statements best describe your opinion of the present system of governing Britain?		
	1973	1991
Works extremely well and could not be improved	5	4
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	43	29
Could be improved quite a lot	35	40

Asking people if they support referendums can tap an underlying feeling that their point of view is not being heard. Currently, a consistent 70 per cent say they would like a referendum on Maastricht—even though around 40 per cent don't know how they would vote. Three quarters wanted a referendum on the poll tax.

Many polls have found a deep pessimism about the economy, and wide anxiety about job security. It is perhaps this apparent loss of faith in the ability of politicians to deliver the goods that is the clearest evidence of declining public faith in politics.

Nonetheless, voter turn-out at the 1992 election was 77.7 per cent, higher than at any election since February 1974, suggesting that the public has not entirely abandoned hope for the electoral process.

The turn-out was lower in safe Labour seats, where, perhaps, there are pockets of a political underclass who feel disenfranchised after 14 years of Conservative government. Voter non-registration shows an increase between 1981 and 1991 from 6.5 per cent to 7.1 per cent of those eligible, but these figures are calculated as a percentage of the population size measured by the census, which in 1991 had a very patchy response rate as a consequence of the poll tax.

The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys estimates that electoral non-registration is as high as 20 per cent among people aged from 20 to 24 and among the population of inner London. A quarter (24 per cent) of the black population is believed not to be registered.

Which leaves the burning question: if the government is so unpopular, why have the Conservatives been re-elected three times in a row?

David Sanders of Essex University has constructed a model that links the way that public attitudes to the economic health of Britain vary to the ups and downs of the parliamentary cycle. The polls tend to show a pattern of deep pessimism during the years between elections—corresponding with government unpopularity—which moves into economic optimism as the general election approaches and profoundly unpopular government measures—for example, privatisation, the Westland affair, mine closures and the poll tax—fade from the public mind.

Sanders' work serves to emphasise the powerful position the government enjoys—particularly in its choice of the election date, but also in the day-to-day research and briefings from the Whitehall machinery and through its influential friends in the media. In this context, the electoral system may be insufficiently sensitive to ensure effective accountability or to balance the power of the executive.

Simon Braunholtz is associate director of MORI

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Bob Rowthorn claims that taxes will have to be increased if Britain is to maintain its welfare state

Welfare straits

Debate over government expenditure in the UK is now dominated by the large fiscal deficit of recent years. At the end of the 1980s, government expenditure and revenue were approximately equal, but there is now a deficit in the region of £50 billion. What is the nature of this deficit? How far is it a structural phenomenon, representing a chronic imbalance between expenditure and taxation? And how far is it purely cyclical, reflecting the passing influence of economic recession on government expenditure and revenue?

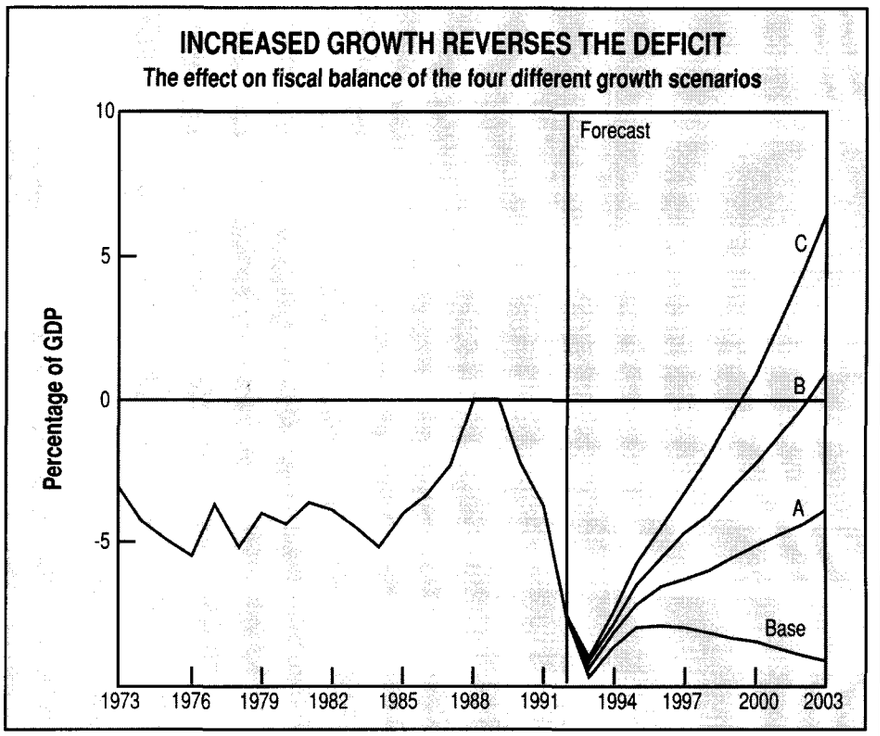
One way of approaching these questions is to consider how economic recovery might affect the future behaviour of this deficit. After all, what ultimately matters is not how the deficit arose, but what, if anything, should be done to correct it.

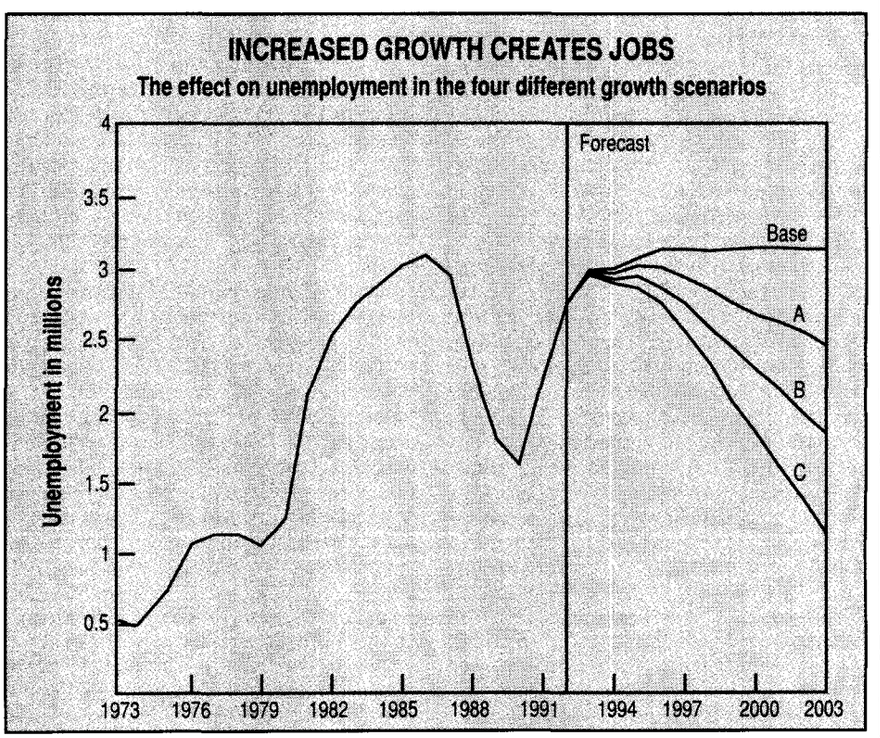
To explore this question, we have examined the implications of four different rates of growth on the deficit over the period 1992 to 2003, using Professor Wynne Godley's macro model of the economy. They all assume that government expenditure is held on a tight rein. In particular, social security benefits are upgraded in line with inflation, not in line with earnings, so their relative value continues to fall, as it has done since 1980. Tax increases already in the pipe- line are taken into account, but otherwise tax rates remain unchanged over the entire period.

The most likely outcome, according to Godley, if policies remain the same, is that GDP grows at an average rate of 2.1 per cent a year. This is the "base case". Employment rises slowly, but this is offset by an increase in the labour force, reflecting population growth and the entry of more women into the labour market. As a result, unemployment remains roughly constant at around three million, as the first chart shows. The balance of payments is also weak, so without some improvement in trade performance significantly faster growth is not feasible.

In scenario A, economic growth is faster. Unemployment falls to about 2.5 million in 2003. This moderately optimistic outcome is what might happen given a sustained economic recovery in western Europe or a significant further real devaluation of the pound.

In scenario B, growth is faster still and unemployment falls to around the level achieved at the peak of the 1980s Lawson boom. Because of growth in the labour force this would require a high rate of job creation.





Finally, in scenario C, growth is sufficient to bring unemployment down to just over one million. This requires creation of four million extra jobs, the bulk of them in the market sector of the economy, producing goods and services for export or private demand. To achieve a permanent increase in market-sector employment on this scale would require a massive improvement in our inflation and trade performance.

Fiscal deficit

The second chart demonstrates what happens to the government fiscal balance under the various scenarios. The measure used excludes receipts from privatisation and from council-house sales and, therefore, gives a fair picture of the underlying state of the budget deficit. These scenarios illustrate vividly the central importance of employment and economic growth for the fiscal balance and government debt. If the market sector of the economy could achieve the performance assumed under C, the financial position of the government would be transformed out of all recognition. Expenditure on unemployment-related benefits would be cut by two thirds, while tax revenue would rise dramatically. As the second chart shows, and the table opposite explains further, the present deficit would be replaced by a surplus exceeding 6 per cent of GDP. This would be sufficient to finance a very large increase in government expenditure with no rise in tax rates at all beyond

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HOW GROWTH COULD SAVE THE WELFARE STATE

Average % growth over period:	Actual 1992	Projection 2003 Base 2.1	A 2.7	B 3.2	C 3.7
Total GDP as % of GDP in 1992	100.0	125.7	133.8	141.0	148.8
Employment	24.8	25.6	26.7	27.8	28.9
Unemployment (millions)	2.7	3.1	2.5	1.8	1.1
Government finances (as % of GDP)					
Primary expenditure	45.2	45.6	42.1	39.5	36.7
Primary receipts	38.8	40.1	40.7	41.8	43.7
Primary balance	-6.4	-5.5	-1.4	2.3	6.8
Net interest payments	-1.2	-3.8	-2.4	-1.4	-0.3
Overall balance	-7.6	-9.2	-3.9	0.9	6.5
Net debt	45.9	106.3	77.3	53.3	27.6

those already in the pipeline.

At the other extreme, under the base projection, both unemployment and the overall fiscal deficit remain extremely high. The primary deficit, which excludes interest payments, shrinks gradually, but this is offset by rising interest payments on the exploding public debt. According to the projection, by the end of the period, this debt is well over 100 per cent of GDP and is rising fast. Such a development would be unsustainable and action to reduce the deficit would be required well before the end of the period.

Under the rather more optimistic scenario A, the overall deficit gradually falls as a percentage of GDP and government debt is eventually stabilised at just under 80 per cent of GDP. This outcome might just be viable, although, in practice, the build up of debt would probably cause serious problems for sterling on the foreign exchange markets.

In particular, the relative value of basic benefits decline, since they are frozen in real terms while real earnings continue rising. Any significant addition to government programmes under this scenario would need to be matched by a corresponding increase in tax rates or reliance on some alternative forms of revenue. These increases would be in addition to any changes required to contain the build up of debt under this scenario.

Tax increases

All this shows that the fiscal problems of the welfare state, and of government activities more generally, are ultimately caused by the failure of the market sector of the economy to create sufficient employment.

However, whoever is in power, it is unlikely that employment in the market sector will grow at anything like the speed required to solve the problem of the deficit. Under quite optimistic assumptions about market sector employment and with a tight reign on government expenditure, the deficit is still likely to remain very large. Government debt will therefore build up rapidly unless spending is cut or taxes are raised. This issue must be squarely faced, not least by the Labour Party. Tax increases may be unpopular but they are necessary if the welfare state is to survive. Moreover, while economies may be acceptable in some areas, the projections presented here already assume a quite inadequate growth in overall public expenditure during the next decade. Labour should argue for faster growth in public spending and should admit this will involve additional taxes over and above any increases required to deal with the present deficit.

This still leaves open a number of questions. Who should pay these higher taxes, when should they be imposed, and what other policy measures should accompany tax increases? If the aim is to preserve or extend the existing welfare state, the amount of extra tax revenue required in the medium term is considerable. This cannot be raised simply by levying taxes on the middle and upper classes, but must be spread widely to cover most of the population. During the Thatcher years, average real earnings in the UK rose faster than in any other OECD country and are still rising. It is quite reasonable to expect the average person to pay more taxes to support the kind of welfare state they desire.

Although tax increases are necessary in the medium term, the timing depends on what happens to the economic recovery. The case for increasing taxes in order to save the welfare state can and must be argued. It is misleading to argue that the welfare state can be preserved or improved simply by taxing the middle and upper classes.

Means testing

The right wants to dismantle much of the welfare state. There is pressure to "target" government expenditure mainly towards the poor, through the use of extensive means-testing to determine eligibility for benefits and access to cheap or free public services. If such a policy were pursued comprehensively, we would be left with a residual welfare system serving only the poor, while the rest of the population would ultimately leave the system and rely on private provision, as in the US. Apart from any moral considerations, this would be economically inefficient.

A universal welfare state has major advantages as a safety net for the average citizen:
Cheaper operation and greater efficiency than private schemes:
- Greater effectiveness in dealing with poverty, with fewer poverty traps and a higher benefit take-up rate than a targeted system
- Less intrusiveness and less policing
- The important social function of reinforcing the sense of solidarity on which the present system depends

For Britain to dismantle the modern universal system would be both morally objectionable and economically irrational. It would certainly allow tax cuts, but any gain for taxpayers would be at least offset by the extra costs of paying directly for health care, education, unemployment insurance and the like.

However, the case for means testing is a seductive one, which has made inroads even on the left. Universal provision is said to be wasteful and expensive, because it involves spending money on the average person, which could be better used by targeting expenditure specifically on the poor. This, it is argued, would allow substantial tax cuts, so everyone would gain. This is simply not true.

If we had a given amount of money to spend, it would clearly be better to target the most needy. But this is not the case. In fact, if universal benefits and services are largely eliminated, the resulting savings are likely to be handed out in tax cuts and not directed towards those who really need them.

Under the present system, more disadvantaged groups benefit because the true cost of supporting them is not clearly identified and they can ride along on the coat-tails of the average person. If most people are forced either into private provision or to pay a high price for public services, spending on the poor will become a separate and clearly visible part of the government budget. It will have to be justified explicitly to taxpayers.

Taxpayers are clearly unlikely to vote consciously to spend more on the poor than they unconsciously spend at present. They will probably vote for less.

The need for reform

To argue for the retention of universal benefits and services does not mean that there is nothing wrong with the welfare state. There is undoubtedly scope for reform. For example, there is a strong case for taxing disability and child benefits and for financing higher education through a graduate supplement on income tax. There is a case for reforming the pension system to integrate public and private systems. There is also a case for a coherent system of job creation, and possibly even workfare, to supplement the present inadequate system of income maintenance for the unemployed.

But such reforms would leave the basic core of the welfare state intact and in some cases would actually reinforce it. Some would also save money, but others would necessarily cost more and the overall savings to be expected are small. The truth is that the universal welfare state is expensive. The trouble is, the alternatives are more expensive and more inequitable.

Bob Rowthorn is professor of economics at Cambridge University. A longer version of this article appears in the first issue of "New Economics" journal, published this week by the Institute for Public Policy Research

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Defying expectations, Japan's socialists are at last in government. But, reports **Hugh Williamson**, the party is showing the same tendencies and splits as Labour is here

Rose tint over Tokyo

Legend has it that Chairman Mao once said he had never encountered a political party so strange and difficult to understand as Japan's socialist party.

Has anything changed? Entering July's Lower House election, the socialists—the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ)—faced a governing party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), that was unpopular, mired in corruption scandals and with a poor economic record. The LDP's parliamentary majority disappeared, but the SDPJ was the main loser, its seats cut by almost half. An anti-SDPJ shift among leading trade unions was a major cause.

Yet now the SDPJ is in power, in a coalition brought together in part by the same trade unions. The coalition is led by breakaway parties from the LDP, which the socialists have bitterly opposed since last in power in 1948. The SDPJ takes the largest number of cabinet seats (six) and its leader is minister for political reform—the hottest political potato—although he plans to resign to take responsibility for the party's "defeat".

Confused? New-look Japanese politics takes some getting used to, and for the SDPJ in particular. In fact, the party faces its toughest test since its foundation in 1945. Not only must it face painful policy compromises, it also confronts searching questions about its own identity and direction.

The SDPJ lost the election because protest voters had other parties to vote for, and because its traditional supporters went elsewhere. Protest voters recognised that they would for once make a difference, so opted for parties more in tune with modern Japan—new conservative parties promising political reform.

Traditional supporters from both right and left deserted the party. On the right, Japan's main national union centre, Rengo, finally abandoned long-running manoeuvres to reform Japan's opposition, withdrawing its support from left-wing SDPJ candidates. Voters on the left were disillusioned by leadership gestures towards joining the (ultimately successful) conservative opposition coalition.

Once the post-election horse-trading started the reformist parties recognised they would lose all credibility if they regrouped with the LDP, so an opposition coalition—an idea promoted strongly by Rengo—was the only option. This depended mainly on the SDPJ, still the largest opposition party.

Despite misgivings, it opted in, and an eight-party coalition led by Hosokawa Morihiro of the conservative reformist Japan New Party took power on 6 August. The coalition includes Democratic Reform, a small Upper House party set up by Rengo in 1989 as part of its attempt to build a bridge between centre-left (and non-communist) parties. The plan failed last year over policy splits on sending troops to UN operations in Cambodia. Besides the LDP, the Japan Communist Party (JCP) is alone in opposition—it has 15 seats, down one from before the election.

Hosokawa, aged 55, is a scion of a feudal ruling clan and has a cultivated elegance to match. An LDP politician for 20 years, he was a prefectual governor before setting up his party in 1991. Life was not all politics; he started as a journalist on the left-leaning *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, where student activists once took him hostage.

This experience may come in useful in dealing with the SDPJ but, at the moment, conservative continuity rather than radical change marks the coalition's policies on economic, social and foreign issues, provoking a communist party official to remark: "If they're merely carrying on the LDP's policies, what was the purpose of changing governments?" Hosokawa's forthright apology for Japan's "war of aggression" in the 1930s and 1940s has been the main exception to date.

"If they're merely carrying on the LDP's policies, what was the purpose of changing governments?"

Yet his coalition can expect stormy seas ahead. In particular, the unity of the SDPJ is necessary to keep the government together, but the party has compromised most and faces internal battles on both personalities and policies. Many on the left are unhappy about cooperating with ex-LDP leaders. They particularly object to Ichiro Ozawa, a former LDP general secretary who, although implicated in several corruption scandals, is now powerbroker behind the LDP-breakaway Japan Renewal Party (JPR), the coalition's most powerful member. Two SDPJ MPs showed their displeasure by not supporting the coalition when it was elected.

Sadao Yamahana, the SDPJ chairman, originally from the left of the party, is personally under severe competing pressures. Resigning after election defeat is traditional in Japan, so he has promised to go, but will stand again in a leadership election this month. Meanwhile, he is minister with the newly established political reform portfolio, and expected to deliver results by December.

Foreign policy has long been the SDPJ's principal identity tag. For decades a pacifist party, opposed to nuclear power and hostile to the US, it has been painfully revising its policies in recent years, yet must now support nuclear power, overseas deployment of Japanese troops and the various US-Japan defence arrangements. Hosokawa's political sweeteners have included moves towards normalising relations with North Korea, which the SDPJ supports. Yet the party must also know its place; just as Hosokawa apologised, four JRP ministers were continuing the LDP practice of visiting the Yasukuni shrine, a symbol for Japan's far-right nationalist movement.

On economic issues, the SDPJ has strong rural support and consequently opposes rice imports. This is in line with current coalition thinking, but Hosokawa and others have previously hinted at liberalisation. The SDPJ opposes increases in consumption tax, but this is an option being considered to pay for income tax cuts aimed at boosting the economy. Business leaders and government bureaucrats have voiced fears of SDPJ influence on economic policy.

Despite having its man in charge, the SDPJ fears electoral disaster if the electoral reform proposals favoured by other coalition parties are forced through. The current multi-seat constituencies are expensive and breed corruption, but the likely alternative—a combined system of single-seat constituencies and proportional representation—may cut the SDPJ's 70 seats by half.

"Ninety-nine per cent of party members are opposed to the combined system," estimates one party official, and a group of 40 MPs are campaigning against it. Yamahana has endorsed it, but will probably face an opponent of the change in the leadership election. If Yamahana loses the vote, the coalition may collapse.

Meanwhile, the SDPJ remains fundamentally divided on ideology and organisation, seriously inhibiting its ability to deal innovatively with change. A dogmatic but influential socialist wing remains at loggerheads with various social democratic factions. This division has frozen policy-making processes, especially on foreign affairs, making the party appear incoherent and out-of-touch. Its more radical policies continue to strike a chord on some issues—polls and protests in 1992 against Japan's renewed military role show this. But the continual need to compromise on policy and balance factional interests have prevented genuine modernisation. As in the British Labour Party, there is a fundamental split on relations with the trade unions, with modernisers arguing that the SDPJ's strong links with Rengo put off voters.

The shock of being in government will be enough to make or break the party. Japan is watching to see if splits occur, and wondering what they would mean for the ruling coalition and the country's political future. It could be some time before Japan's socialists become any easier to understand.

Hugh Williamson's book "Coping with the Miracle: Japan's unions explore new international relations" is to be published in the autumn

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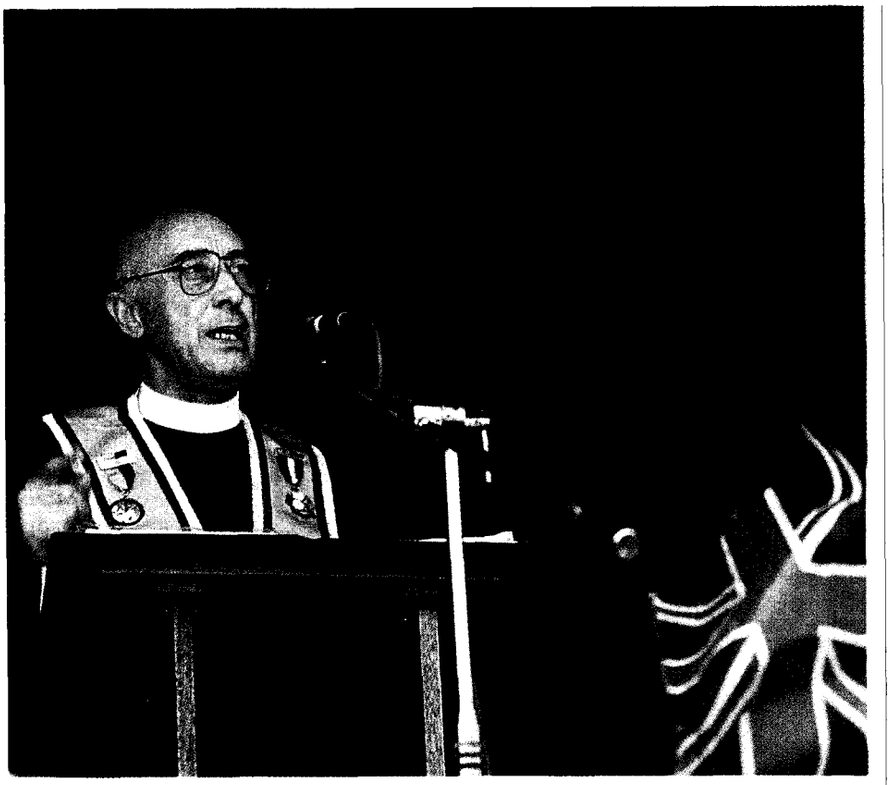

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Northern Ireland's churchmen spout platitudes while congregations shrink

The media use the clergy as the voice of Ireland. But religious platitudes are irrelevant nonsense, says **Malachi O'Doherty**

Beyond belief

Seamus Hopkins was caught by Protestants and beaten to death. Bricks were dropped on his head. It was actually the second time this had happened to him. The first attack, six years ago, had left him brain-damaged and, as a consequence of this, he tended to wander. He wandered into streets saner Catholics stayed out of.

"Could you forgive the men who did this?" a reporter asked Seamus' mother on the day the body was found.

Mrs Hopkins said no, and her answer made headlines.

The families of the dead here are routinely invited to forgive, and whether they do or don't, it's still a story.

This trend started with Gordon Wilson, who, in 1987, said that he forgave the people who, that morning, had killed his daughter and others in a bombing of the Remembrance Day service in Enniskillen.

Others in Enniskillen may have felt cheated out of their right to be angry with murderers, but the local media established a template for future coverage and has been prompting forgiveness from the bereaved ever since.

"How do you feel about the killers?" they ask. "Do you have a message for them?" Then the words of distressed and, at times, tranquillised people, are put before us as markers of the spiritual health of our communities, repeated through the days in bulletins and headlines as if they were the products of deep reflection.

Reporters often sound gauche, as if they are aware that the authority to offer the shoulder of the province isn't easily feigned by a young man or woman of twentysomething, who is often an English trainee anyway, in a nursery slopes war zone. But murder is an embarrassment. It is something few people can respond to plausibly.

Last Friday evening, both local television stations here led with a report that the father of a man who had that morning been shot dead in his bed, had called for prayers for the killers of his son.

Joe Edwards had said: "Someone should say a prayer for them . . . they are sick . . . I don't hate them." To my ear—and I may be wrong—this came across as tired and dismissive, as if Mr Edwards were too drained even to feel contempt. It was passed on to the public as a pious call to Christian love.

The unctuous saturation of political news with moral reflection includes the high profile given to clergy.

Loyalist gunmen ambushed a Catholic ice-cream man called Jim Bell at the start of his day's work last week. The media did what it always does: it approached his parish priest for an interview, and from the priest we learned that Jim was a hard-working man who loved his family and, as if this were entirely to his credit, "had no interest in politics". He was not one of "the few bad men".

The media image of the troubles here switches from the "few bad men" version to the "sick society version" without noticing that the two contradict each other.

A reporter could have been sent into Jim Bell's local pub to talk to his friends and neighbours, but that would have been risky. Someone might have said things that are covered by the broadcasting ban. Real anger might have come out, and that would have been inciteful.

When someone is murdered in Northern Ireland, the media turns immediately to the church leaders for a response. One major story on Ulster Television last Friday was that the heads of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches had united in condemning the IRA bomb attack on Armagh, the cathedral city of both churches.

Now, it would have been news if they had thought the bomb was a good thing, but it was hardly news that they didn't.

To an outsider, it might seem legitimate to give such prominence to pan-sectarian gestures like this, if they thought that the core problem was that religious Protestants and religious Catholics hated each other and needed their clergy to set an example.

The reality, I believe, is that clergy are resorted to as substitutes for real people who, if asked what they thought about a neighbour being killed, might be less predictable, less platitudinous, stroppier—or might just be afraid to speak, lest it be their turn next. It is by default that the clergy are elevated in the media, not because people here take them seriously.

Imagine the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Hume being asked on the national news to comment on every murder in England, and their comments being headlined. That's what we have here. Northern Ireland is a society undergoing rapid secularisation, with fewer and fewer people going to church, yet the clergy are still lighted on as the spokespeople of imagined communities of homogeneous, hard-working and decent religious people, and every bible-clutching whinger is given the chance to advance himself as the knowing insider, the confidant of communities that are, in fact, deserting the churches.

One of the sad things about the church being given such a voice at these times is that they often have so little of value to say. Fr Aidan Brankin, addressing mourners at the funeral of Sean Lavery, said: "I wonder at times if those involved in such murders . . . would allow a very ill relative to receive blood in hospital. Would they ask where or from whom the blood came? Many hundreds of Protestants are walking around with Catholic blood in their veins, and vice versa."

This is the irrelevant nonsense of a clergy that doesn't have to anticipate contradiction or serious enquiry.

Responsible broadcasting now is sanitary, distant broadcasting, founded on and promoting illusions. It is not bringing us closer to the reality of what has happened. It is sheltering us from it behind the myth that the rest of us, who didn't kill someone in the night, will be all right if we cling to our faith. It is incredible that modern British journalism carries such messages.

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Hanging Gordon Brown out to dry

Critics of Labour's economic policy have seized on John Smith's speech to the TUC conference as one in the eye for the shadow chancellor, Gordon Brown. It was not, as it happens, a particularly riveting occasion. Smith did not enthrall his audience and looked relieved when his ordeal was over. But the trade union leaders received his coded message. That is why it is considered to have been such a success.

The last five minutes of Smith's speech made all the difference. It was then that he promised a Charter of Rights for workers—old wine in a new bottle about giving them statutory rights—and upheld Labour's commitment to a minimum wage. "Ah ha!" you could sense the trade union chiefs smirking. "Not all our policies at the last election are being thrown overboard. I wonder what Brown has to say about that!"

Smith went on to be even more daring. "The goal of full employment remains at the heart of Labour's vision for Britain," he affirmed. Brown himself has made this point over and over again. But, for some reason, only Smith is considered to have said it with the right degree of sincerity.

"Labour's economic strategy will ensure that all instruments of macro-economic management, whether it concerns interest rates, the exchange rate, or the levels of borrowing, will be geared to sustained growth and rising employment," Smith continued. Now this really did call for a celebration. Smith was a Keynesian after all!

Finally, there was the epiphany. Just seconds from the end of his speech, Smith made reference to "our need to share our wealth". Glory be! He was still a redistributionist at heart.

It was all smiles and good humour at the fringe meeting of the Full Employment Forum later that day. Why, Smith wanted the very same thing as that treacherous Bryan Gould outfit! Frontbenchers Michael Meacher and Dawn Primarolo, who had been accused on the news that day of stirring up trouble for their leader by speaking at the meeting, adopted an air of injured innocence. "We are *all* committed to full employment," Meacher beamed.

John Edmonds, subtle as ever, could not resist crowing. If anyone at the meeting had said what Smith had, he suggested, "It would have been regarded as an attack on someone very senior in the Labour Party." He had been worried by some of Gordon Brown' pronouncements, he confessed, but Smith's speech had laid his anxieties to rest.

So there you have it. According to this rewrite of history, Smith is secretly a member of the anti-Brown camp.

I suspect that Smith would not be too unhappy with this interpretation. He is an experienced politician who knew what he was doing. Gavin Laird of the Engineering Workers sussed him out straight away. It was Smith's "trade-off" over one member, one vote, he concluded.

OMOV and economics have been deliberately entangled by John Edmonds and others. Smith was trying to win the unions' support for his levy-plus scheme by hanging Gordon Brown out to dry. He must have figured that he could make it up to Brown later.

And yet, so bizarre has the debate on economics become in the Labour Party that Smith did not say anything all that different to Brown. There were hair-splitting changes of emphasis, that is all.

Even Edmonds admitted hypocritically at the fringe meeting that Brown had been "unfairly attacked" over taxation. "You have to clear the ground a bit before you build on it," he said good-naturedly.

The truth is that Brown has done Smith a double favour. First, he has dumped Labour's old taxation policy, which, whatever anyone says now, was universally considered (including by Bryan Gould and Ken Livingstone) to have lost Labour the election, particularly in the south of England. Second, he has attracted all the blame for it to himself, leaving Smith scot-free of the charge of betraying Labour's principles.

Brown has done Smith a double favour. He has dumped Labour's tax policy and attracted all the blame to himself

Brown's big mistake was to imply that Labour might actually cut people's taxes. It has been easy to scoff that this claim lacks credibility. His presentation of his economics paper was truly awful. He gave the impression that he wanted to leave the rich to enjoy their ill-gotten gains and that Labour no longer believed in redistribution. "We're not going to tax for tax's sake," he growled, as if he agreed with the Tories that Labour governments always raised taxes on a wanton basis.

Labour still wants to take money off people but is at a loss to think up voter-friendly ways of doing so. That is why Brown has been proposing closing down tax loopholes for the wealthy and a windfall tax on utilities. It also explains why hypothecated taxes are becoming so fashionable right now, although Brown continues to resist their lure.

A pamphlet published earlier this summer by the new think tank, Demos, gave hypothecated taxes a veneer of intellectual respectability. The authors, Geoff Mulgan and Robin Murray, touched a chord by calling their pamphlet *Reconnecting Taxation*. People were no longer willing to hand governments a blank cheque to spend as they saw fit, they argued, so money had to be shown to be going on good causes.

Last week, Labour's health spokesman, David Blunkett, made the most explicit call so far for linking tax to specific expenditure. By suggesting, however, that Labour might earmark certain taxes to be spent on health, he gave credence to the view that hypothecated taxes will simply encourage everyone to demand more money for their own pet projects or departments.

Tony Blair also seemed to hint at hypothecation in a letter to the *Guardian* last week, in which he argued that it was "vital to link tax and spending to the purposes for which the money is raised". In actual fact, Blair recognises the difficulties of a system of taxation that could lead people to pick and choose what they wanted to pay for. Their idea of good causes might not always be the same as Labour's. But he does believe in the principle of "reconnection".

That, however, is not so much a tax as a spending problem. At the last election, it was clear to everyone that Labour's tax increases were going to be spent on uprating child benefit and pensions—and that there was not going to be anything left in the kitty. Linking tax and spending was positively off-putting because it showed how expensive welfare was.

What Brown's opponents really resent is not the absence of tax increases but the lack of spending commitments. There is a real problem here, for without spending commitments, it is not obvious that Labour has anything to offer the poor and dispossessed. But having them raises the question: how are they to be paid for?

Hence the hard cop, soft cop act. Brown has been talking tough, while Smith has been making reassuring noises about Labour's sense of fairness, social justice and compassion. It has turned out to be quite an effective strategy, as Smith's reception at the TUC this week showed. But it has been at the expense of Brown's reputation.

For an ambitious politician, that is a heavy price to pay. Smith owes him one.

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SIDELINERS

The renewed resistance of union barons to one-member one-vote has frozen the migration of young Labour aspirant politicians in midstride, according to a most perceptive Labour peeress. Until OMOV seemed certain, ambitious young politicians tended to flock to London. They would hope to establish their reputations in a cause group, like Frank Field in the Child Poverty Action Group, or as the assistant to a prominent MP, like Jack Straw with Barbara Castle, or as a union researcher, like Peter Hain in the Union of Communication Workers.

When OMOV's success seemed certain, shrewd aspirants realised this would help locally popular candidates, wiping out the edge enjoyed by union-backed candidates under Labour's recent selection system. Since union-backed candidates could be in the field first and benefit from a regional carve-up among big unions, they had an advantage that made their rivals curse furiously in private. I remember my late friend, Ray Fletcher, seat-searching as the Cardiff-based Welsh tutor-organiser of the WEA. After a string of rebuffs, he admitted that, as a non-Welshman, he did not stand a chance in Wales, although then at his peak as an analyst on Tribune, and a powerful speaker. He reluctantly found solace in Ilkeston.

Although union-backed candidates will retain the advantage of sponsorship money in safe seats, in marginal seats the advantage in OMOV selection would normally be with a local candidate with proven pulling power in council elections. OMOV would thus intensify a development already under way. Recent elections have shown that some of the most successful capturers of marginal seats have been local councillors and council leaders. Thus, Keith Bradley, initially a Manchester city councillor, in 1987 retook Withington, the Tories' former last "golden redoubt" in south Manchester, ousting Fred Sylvester. In 1992, with a swing of fully 7 per cent—enough to have won Labour the election if applied nationally—Bradley converted Withington into a safe Labour seat with a margin of over 21 per cent.

Selection of the best possible vote-pullers has become more crucial because of Labour's tactical success in the battle over how seat boundaries are redrawn to conform with population shifts. Instead of losing a further 20 seats, this has been cut to six or even fewer. This is because a long-planned strategy helped Labour professionals to urge persuasively a "doughnut" solution for over-populous seats based on bigger towns and smaller cities: this separates Labour-leaning inner-cities from Tory suburbs or rural areas. In 1983, the Tories succeeded in pushing their "sandwich" system, which added Tory-leaning suburbs and rural areas and then split the seat in half, often providing two Tory-leaning marginals. But, until the OMOV issue is settled, we won't know whether the new "doughnuts" will smack more of the foisted union bureaucrat or the locally popular councillor.

Andrew Roth

EDWARD PEARCE

An awesome new political philosophy is born. Can Blunkettism regenerate the Labour Party?

The argument about foregoing further direct taxation will not go away. After the small ripples I complained of, comes a much bigger ripple, more of a wave, from David Blunkett, but with implications for anyone else who has ambitions to do things in a spending department. Blunkett's Oldham speech (3 September) is courteous and avoids personalised conflict, but is in principled opposition to the Brown stance.

He sets out the cruel comparison between expenditure on health in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. We are eighth within the EC at £582, spending more per capita on health than Spain, Portugal and Greece, heavily less than seventh-placed Italy with £799 and putting up just over half of the spending of Germany and France (£1,063 and £1,046 respectively).

On health spending as a percentage of GDP, we come seventh, if Portugal's charitable expenditure is discounted: we spend 6.1 per cent, three quarters of the proportions of their incomes given over by France, the Netherlands and Germany, and below Ireland, Belgium and Italy.

Blunkett's speech is a statement of traditional purposes sustained by new means; a new way to pay old debts

Blunkett's response to this state of affairs is characteristically thoughtful. He does not make an empty rhetorical blast at it all being mystically unfair, the hallmark of so many bad Labour performances in the Commons. But what he says is in flat contradiction of the Brown thesis. He calls for hypothecated revenue, something that readers will be familiar with me doing. The whole point of the argument is that people don't *like* paying higher taxes *in vacuo*, to be disposed of by the higher wisdom of ministers and civil servants. They see it as money going into the maw.

Blunkett says flatly: "We need to win people over to a willingness to pay more. One way of approaching this is to look at earmarking any additional direct taxation, specifically for investment in areas which would command universal public support and would directly increase the wellbeing of the individual and the wider community. This 'hypothecated' tax would be in addition to existing spending and would indicate very clearly to the electorate where additional resources would be directed. Such proposals should aim to win people over, not only to improved services, but investment in economic recovery and increased growth." Well, you can argue about the growth bit, but we have the makings of a doctrine there. The Oldham doctrine is set sharply against the defensive minimalism of Gordon Brown: "Trust us, we shan't cause grief to the well-to-do."

A friend of mine from university days observed last week that, as an old Gaitskellite who had finished up with the Lib Dems out of the turmoils of 1981 and still, at heart, an old Gaitskellite, he was quietly content since this now put him to the left of the Labour Party. This is an accurate measure of the shift in politics since about 1985-86. The Mandelsonian marketing exercise, the Kinnock authoritarianism, the flaccid defeatism begotten, understandably, of defeat, have helped turn the whole political spectrum into a rightward-leaning parallelogram. In the sixties and seventies, it was a left-wing parallelogram with Jim Prior, rather more attractively, playing the Gordon Brown role, by trying to extract a less injurious form of defeat from the natural dominion of the unions and a universally accepted condition of rising real public expenditure.

We shall yet see some quite bitter politics on this. Between Blunkett and the Brown-Mandelson camp there is less than no love lost. But if it should turn to faction-fighting at least the battle will be about something that actually matters. The Oldham speech is a fighting back, through new and intelligent means—hypothecating—not by the left or anything which historically could have been called "left", but on behalf of Labour's never before questioned commitment to public services. Blunkett's speech is a statement of traditional purposes, to be sustained by new means, a new way to pay old debts with a vengeance.

But even he treads softly. Earmarking can work for the NHS, he says, because it relates to a near-universal benefit. It does not activate "the suspicion of policies which seek directly to transfer income from one section of the population to another—from increased taxation to increased cash benefits". So the battle will take place on narrow ground—absolutely no reason for not having to fight it.

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Should there be self-help groups for those who squabble on their vacations? **Laurie Taylor** is horrified at the idea, knowing it could ruin a well-loved ritual

What we argued about on our holidays

I like to start my holiday rows early. Nothing delivers a surer sense that the vacation is properly underway than the arguments generated five minutes out of the airport by the niceties of driving on what, with a last imperial gasp, we all refer to as the wrong side of the road. With my voice well under control, I point out to my partner that I don't mind at all being told that I've missed the last two Aix-en-Provence exits from the autoroute, or even that I'm driving in the middle lane at 15mph with my left arm constantly flailing the air like a pseudopod in a vain search for a gear stick. It is, I insist, simply the way that I'm being told. "There's no point in shouting at me," I say quietly, with all the comfortable sense of sinking back into a well-blown Lilo or hinging back the shell of my first *moule marinière*. "Just tell me in a normal voice. Don't get agitated. Remember, we're supposed to be on our holidays. Try to relax."

All of which leads as naturally as crepuscule follows day into an invigorating 30-minute debate about why, if we're on holiday, it couldn't be her rather than me who's in the driving seat. (There is, of course, no answer to that. Any more than there is an answer to the awkward fact that all but one of my liberal-minded male friends, whether at home or abroad, somehow contrive to get themselves in the driver's seat for any motor outing of more complexity than a trip down the road to Safeway for extra oven-ready ciabatta. One wonders whether this pattern of dominance extends beyond the traditional heterosexual couple. Does the "M" part of an S and M partnership inevitably end up like most wives, with nothing more technical to manipulate on long journeys than a road map and a pack of Polos? Is the insertee—to use the mechanical jargon of the sociological treatise—statistically more likely to find the vanity mirror lodged behind their sun visor than the insertor?).

On a good foreign holiday, arguments about driving have usually enough life in them to last to the villa door when, of course, it's time to settle back for a few other old favourites. I'm particularly fond of the one about whether it's wiser to leave the travellers cheques in the villa for a passing burglar or to take them along as bait to strolling muggers on the Promenade des Anglais (I play this one either way depending on my partner's opening gambit). And after a week away there's nearly always a good day or two to spend on the pros and cons of ringing the airport to see if it's possible, even on these cut-price tickets, to fly home a good ten days early ("I'm not saying I'm not having a good holiday. I'm simply saying that I've had enough of it"). And in the background, there always lurks the possibility of a rattling good debate about the degrees of stupidity that can be attributed to someone who sat out in the blazing sun for over five hours on only the second hot day of the holiday wearing nothing but bleeding Factor Two. "Didn't you feel yourself getting burnt?" "No, I didn't. And anyway I always go red before I go brown."

But what is already making this year's package trip to California so exciting is the arrival of a completely new and unchewed bone of contention. For the past two days as we've strolled in the relentless heat up and down the seafront of Santa Barbara wondering whether or not our proximity to Michael Jackson's ranch gives us more right than anyone back home to pronounce on the likelihood of his having molested young boys, we've periodically argued with an intensity usually reserved for such primal holiday rows as "I thought we had an agreement to bring just three books each", about what can only be called the ontological nature of our predicament.

To put it in the baldest terms, Cathie maintains that being here in Santa Barbara is not a proper holiday. There is one main, and I have to say repetitive, plank to her argument. She insists that all real holidays are necessarily filled by almost endless and frustrating attempts to discover solutions to relatively simple problems. In France, for example, it would be considered a good day's work to have discovered after half-a-dozen supermarket visits and innumerable failed attempts at conversation with passing shoppers that the French do not sell anything that in Britain we would recognise as "double cream".

This, she maintains, is not merely a language problem. France, like other European countries, expends considerable effort on preserving its culture by making life as difficult as possible for visitors. California, on the other hand, not only anticipates every possible contingency, but creates solutions for problems that one never knew existed. (It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, on average, 300 new products per week reach the shelves of its supermarkets and drugstores, or that the most vigorous advertising campaign currently to be seen on television is that between two products which both claim to at last provide the solution to getting rid of "soap slime build-up" on the glass walls of one's shower unit).

Take the case of Cathie's sunglasses. When one arm fell off on the beach, we pleasantly resigned ourselves to a long day visiting opticians and jewellers and chainstores in search of a replacement screw. It would, we thought, be a refreshing change from any more hours spent counting the proportion of "weirdos" to "regular people" on the embarcadero ("regulars" currently lead by a narrow 10 per cent). We started with an unlikely T-shirt and sunglasses shop at the bottom of the pier. In 15 seconds flat, the young assistant had checked the screw width with a special calibrator and handed her a two-dollar plastic kit that contained a tube of replacement screws, a miniature screwdriver and a magnifying glass.

It was—to put it rather insensitively—only sheer good fortune that at that very moment we were asked for some loose change by a passing Mexican. Two minutes later, we were happily into a good-old straightforward battle (with lots of half-remembered quotes from David Rieff's *Los Angeles: capital of the third world* and Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*) about the relative morality of taking holidays in areas that only gained their status as places of vacation by virtue of their systematic exclusion, nay expulsion, of the indigenous inhabitants.

Meanwhile, behind all our days in the sun lies one other terrible thought: the fear that any day now there will appear among the list of self-help groups in the *Santa Barbara Independent* (which already extends to Anger Management, Mid-life Crisis, and Sexual Obsessiveness) one entirely devoted to assisting those who row on holidays. Now that would upset the ontological applecart.

Ros Asquith

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One of the incidental consequences of the desktop publishing revolution has been that a fancy letterhead is now within the reach of anyone who puts wordprocessor to paper. So it is with Patrick Harrington, of "Information Management", 47d Roland Gardens, London SW7—better known to readers, no doubt, as the National Front organiser whose presence at North London Polytechnic brought the poly almost to the point of closure in the 1980s.

Harrington now styles himself an advertising and public relations consultant, which is a bit like King Herod setting up as press officer for Save the Children. Who employs him, I wonder, and does he use his NF connections in his sales pitch to potential clients?

Harrington writes to NSS this week in response to Ray Hill's letter of 27 August. "My attention has been drawn . . . " he begins. (This sort of opening is increasingly common. It carries two implicit messages: first, an act of distancing—I wouldn't lower myself to read your publication personally, someone else told me about it; and second, a sort of warning—correct what I claim you got wrong or I'll be consulting m'learned friends.)

Harrington's complaint is that Hill refers to him as "a dyed-in-the-wool fascist": "I should like to make it clear that I do not accept such a description and in fact oppose a strong, centralised state." Well, that's all right then—would "a dyed-in-the-wool racist" be acceptable for future purposes?

Harrington's letter is, in fact, only the latest item of correspondence in what is becoming an increasingly arcane argument between the publishers of the anti-fascist magazine, Searchlight, and the anti-secret services research publication, Lobster. The argument spilled over on to these pages as a result of our decision to publish (6 and 13 August) British National Party defector Tim Hepple's account of life inside the BNP HQ.

Last week, Lobster contributor Larry O'Hara denied here that his anti-Searchlight pamphlet, "A Lie Too Far", described Searchlight's former mole in the far right, Ray Hill, as an arsonist. Specifically, he wrote: "No edition of the pamphlet I have distributed refers to any such thing."

This may be strictly true: O'Hara may not personally have distributed the offending pamphlet. But as Searchlight editor Gerry Gable points out, there is an edition that contains the allegation of arson: "Page 13 of the edition I have of this scurrilous pamphlet contains the line, 'What can be said of Hill is that he is a convicted arsonist, as well as being a thief, a liar and a thug.' The fact is that Ray Hill has neither a conviction for arson nor for theft." O'Hara may have put a black line through the relevant sentence in the copies he distributed, but not before unamended versions of his pamphlet had already made it into circulation.

NSS will be publishing a "new readers start here" account of this row in the near future. For the time being, though, the correspondence is firmly closed. What we would appreciate instead is an explanation of another of these debilitating disputes on the anti-fascist left, this time concerning the rival demonstrations called for 16 October. One, backed by Searchlight and a host of other anti-racist organisations, involves a march on the BNP HQ in south London, demanding its closure. The other, a "march for justice", organised by the Anti-Racist Alliance and supported by the TUC, takes place in central London on the same day. Why?

Finally, it is worth returning to that letter from Patrick Harrington. He concludes it with the intriguing piece of news that: "I have established a historical archive at Warwick University concerning the National Front that contains internal minutes of meetings, bulletins and local and national newsletters. There are no restrictions concerning who has access to this material." Readers wishing to find out more—or to avail themselves of Information Management's advertising and public relations services—can contact Harrington on 071-373 3432.

Steve Platt

Abuse close to home

Sarah Baxter (Political Column, 3 September) rightly highlights the Joy Gardner case as one of a series of immigration and asylum scandals. Revelations that near-medieval restraint techniques were apparently used against a woman in her own home, in front of her five-year-old son, while she was under the impression that the Home Secretary was still considering her case, shocked the local community. The outrage was all the greater because the description of what happened could so easily have come from one of the dictatorial police states elsewhere in the world, on which public opinion has always looked down so smugly.

Haringey Council's immediate call for an independent public enquiry into the events surrounding the case was supported by a strikingly wide range of organisations in the borough, and even secured the acquiescence of the Tory group on the council. However vigorous the Police Complaints Authority inquiry is, the reality is that it remains unlikely that it will deal with all the questions which need to be answered. Its terms of reference are limited and, crucially, cannot require the Immigration Service to collaborate fully.

Many in our ethnic community already fear a cover-up. Only those with something to hide oppose the desire to get to the bottom of what happened in this particular case. The test will be whether a number of key questions were answered.

As an example, consider the matter of the restraints used on Joy Gardner, which seem to have led to her death. First, it is still not clear what specific equipment was used. Second, no proper answers have been given as to how widespread is the use of such equipment. The Metropolitan Police has rulebooks for everything; what are the guidelines for the use of restraint equipment, and were they breached in this case? Third, it needs to be established why it was assumed that a single woman would present such a violent threat to five police officers and an immigration official, that the specialist heavy squad of the SO1(3) division needed to be mobilised and restraint equipment carried. Who authorised the operation and the level of force to be used? Fourth, when was the use of restraint equipment in deportation cases authorised, and by whom?

Only a public inquiry is likely to deal with, and be seen to deal with, such issues in an adequate fashion.

Councillor Toby Harris
Haringey Town Hall
London N22

Disappointed of Faversham

Gareth Smyth's portrayal of Tunbridge Wells ("Not so disgusted of Tunbridge Wells", 27 August) nestles cosily within the strait-jacket of caricature.

As secretary of the Kent County Labour Party, I resent Gareth Smyth's depiction of the Tunbridge Wells Labour Party. Smyth would have us believe that it is populated with jolly old (or young) eccentrics, represented by Walter Clary and Ian Carvell respectively. Members of the party in Kent will resent Smyth's portrayal of these two highly respected members. And the Tunbridge Wells Labour Party is far from being the fodder for the smart smirk that is implied.

During the county elections, my role as Labour's coordinator for the 16 Kent constituencies was continually eased by the Tunbridge Wells flying canvass teams, who stormed into work in our target seats. Labour's five gains—sufficient to deprive the Tories of overall control of the county—would not have been possible without the imagination and drive of the Tunbridge Wells Labour Party. Smyth's article revealed none of this. As I abhor cliché, I will avoid his use of "disgusted", and sign myself as "disappointed" of Kent.

Helen Brinton
Faversham
Kent

A good starting position

I would like to reiterate some of the points I made to Gareth Smyth ("Not so disgusted of Tunbridge Wells", 27 August) during our discussion for his work and which are relevant to his article, but for some reason failed to appear in it.

It is true that Labour has not had a tremendous amount of electoral success in Tunbridge

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Wells and that we polled less than 14 per cent in the 1992 general election. However, it is also a fact that, out of the three main political parties, Labour's percentage of the vote increased, whereas the others' fell. Small comfort, you may think, but from little acorns grow great oaks.

In Tunbridge Wells, Labour has a strong membership, nearly 500—better than in almost half the other constituencies within the country. One of the reasons for this is because of our organisational skills. We carefully and thoughtfully plan our campaigns on both national and local issues. We also take on a high profile and are very active in showing that Labour is a strong force to contend with in Tunbridge Wells and throughout Kent. Although we are not the main opposition on the Tunbridge Wells borough council, we are on the county council—where we also hold the position of council chair.

We start in an excellent position for next year's European elections, and are confident that both Kent East and Kent West could fall to us. We also expect to do well in the local elections where we will, as always, campaign on the issues that matter.

Peter Warner
Chair, Tunbridge Wells
Constituency Labour Party

THIS ENGLAND

£5 for all entries printed below. Entries on a POSTCARD please

• The Reverend Francis Bown, chairman of the high church group Ecclesia, has posted a notice outside his church [in Hull] advertising it as a women priest-free zone.

Reverend Bown laughed off catcalls from passers-by, and joked: "I'm afraid Hull is the armpit of England—damp, smelly and of interest only to fetishists."—*Guardian* (Tim Lang)

• This week British Rail will be asked to destroy thousands of leaflets and posters from a new advertising campaign because they feature a character from a Matisse painting. Lawyers acting for the Matisse estate will write to BR threatening legal action unless the posters and leaflets are destroyed.

BR admits it did not ask permission: "We would have thought about it if we were copying the painting but we made an effort to make it look different by putting her in an InterCity seat."—*Times* (Francis Harvey)

Bitter tribute

I was just about to write to *NSS* to announce the end of European Nuclear Disarmament (END), and I learn of the death of E P Thompson. It makes the news all the more bitter.

This summer, the END liaison committee organised its final seminar in Maastricht. It wasn't very well attended, compared with the huge conventions of the 1980s; there were interesting contributions, but virtually *no discussion of nuclear disarmament*. Look at some extracts from the original appeal for a nuclear-free Europe, drafted by E P Thompson, Ken Coates of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, and others in 1980: "For at least 25 years, the forces of both the North Atlantic and the Warsaw Alliance have each had sufficient nuclear weapons to annihilate their opponents and at the same time to endanger the very basis of civilised life. But with each passing year, competition in nuclear armaments has multiplied their numbers, increasing the probability of some devastating accident or miscalculation . . . In appealing to fellow Europeans, we are not turning our backs on the world. In working for the peace of Europe, we are working for the peace of the world . . .We need to mount an irresistible pressure for a Europe free of nuclear weapons . . ."

And what do we have in 1993? Nuclear weapons across Europe from Britain and France to the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Britain has an increased arsenal with the commissioning of the Trident submarines, each with more than 4,000 times the killing power of the Hiroshima explosion. It would be a fitting tribute to E P Thompson if we renewed efforts to make links across the continent from east to west, to work for a nuclear-free Europe in a nuclear-free world.

Rae Street
Chair, CND International
Lancs

Teaching tolerance

Following your editorial on education ("Religion and education", 27 August), and the response of *NSS* readers to it (Letters, 3 September), I must write in support of the concept of religious education. I do not mean the religious indoctrination found in some denominational schools (most of which is unsuccessful anyway), but the study of spiritual and moral issues, and of religious texts.

So much literature written in English, so much of our common European moral system, so much of our history, is almost unintelligible without some understanding of the Bible and Christian belief, that it seems counter-productive to ignore it in schools—even for those like the British Humanist Association, who wish to see Britain as a secular state.

It seems striking that some countries that have totally secularised their schools actually seem to have more problems with religious extremists than does Britain. Secularisation did not stop the BJP in India, David Koresh in the US, or even Ronald Reagan from gaining important "religious" footholds. Maybe sensible religious education might have.

Tom Barnes
London NW6

Catching up with the right

Huw Richards' otherwise excellent article on education ("Schools of thought", 20 August) skirts round three important aspects of policy.

It is a measure of the political success of Tory education policy that testing has come to be seen as desirable for purposes other than those of improving children's performance. Essentially, testing is important to the Tories not, as John Patten likes to pretend, for "raising standards", but for the marketisation of the school system. Standards have been rising over the past six years, but the need for a justification of "simple" testing and league tables has meant that the real achievements of teachers have been rubbished, and false panics created over "standards". Labour needs to decide what it is going to do about testing and league tables. Certainly the conclusion of the Dearing Report, that testing is "primarily summative", needs to be challenged.

Following on from testing is the issue of selection. The Tories' carefully managed retreat on testing at ages seven and 14 still allows for the use of Eleven Plus-style tests, such as those being developed in the London borough of Wandsworth. Coupled with Mr Patten's enthusiasm for "specialist" schools, these represent a return to a two- or three-tier selective education. Some schools have abandoned the principle of access for all to GCSE courses, and are forcing teachers to make deterministic judgments on pupils' future success.

The final area that needs tackling is that of the curriculum. The right has long argued that the national curriculum is too prescriptive and has an unhealthy egalitarian bias. It would certainly put paid to their idea of sink schools teaching a basic core of maths, English and science

Min Cooper

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while others, eventually charging top-up fees, would offer the "deluxe" full curriculum. Labour needs to reconcile the requirement for a manageable curriculum, which allows scope for choice and creativity, with the original vision of the national curriculum as an *entitlement* curriculum for all children. It also has to decide if it has anything to say about the shape and content of the curriculum—and the running on this, too, has so far been made by the right.

Andy Gibbons
London SW17

Misguided attack

One of the malign aspects of Thatcherism that is less frequently remarked upon was its philistine undermining of our universities. It is therefore a pity to see Christopher Price ("From ivory tower to concrete jungle", 20 August) joining in the well-known sport of university-bashing, much beloved of populists down the ages, with his cheap jibes about quiet cloisters, leisured regimes and fraudulent courses. What could be more fraudulent, I ask myself, than the so-called politically correct courses of contemporary relevance, where only certain authors and certain schools of thought are admissible?

An element of preciousness and lack of accountability there may have been, but Price's criticism of elitism should not be extended to the idea of the university itself. It is surely the aim of socialists to see the ideal of a liberal, critical education spread much more widely throughout society. It is precisely because the universities provide a potential focus for alternative critical thought in a pluralist society that the Thatcherites have mounted their attack. We should not align ourselves with this.

Colin Low
London E8

Cultural fade-out

Gaynor Kavanagh's views ("Exhibitionist tendencies", 27 August) on increasing the accessibility of museums are welcome, but she omits the increasing difficulty of creating such access as a result of the government's restructuring of public-sector finance and management. Of the United Kingdom's museums, 800 are funded by local authorities, which currently spend £128 million a year, all of which is discretionary.

The public sector is crucial to nationwide museum provision, and local authority museums are the backbone of this.

Local authority provision is being seriously damaged by annual waves of increasingly draconian spending cuts, as many councils withdraw slowly from discretionary services. The capital that might fund investment in access technology is often not even available to repair listed buildings or invest in limited disabled access. Significant collections may be dispersed, the local professional expertise that underpins museum services contract, and new investment for a new century be the pipe-dream of the redundant.

We are witnessing a gradual choking-off of access to our own histories and cultures, after a century of investment and care prompted by local Victorians higher-minded than their contemporary national imitators. The undermining of our museum services will have its greatest consequences in years to come—when we realise the consequences of not being able to propagate from the wrecked seedbeds of our culture. Never mind, our children can watch Sky TV's Museum Channel, hosted and interpreted by Ronald McDonald.

Councillor John Lock
Newham Town Hall
London E7

Poison irony

Am I the only reader to see the irony contained in last week's *NSS*? First, you publish a piece commemorating the life of E P Thompson ("A life of radical dissent", 3 September), noting his achievements in the fight against nuclear weapons; and then, within two pages, you publish an advert for the innocuous-sounding Sellafield Repository Project Information Centre, a body run by United Kingdom Nirex Ltd and British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Stephen Cope
Hampshire

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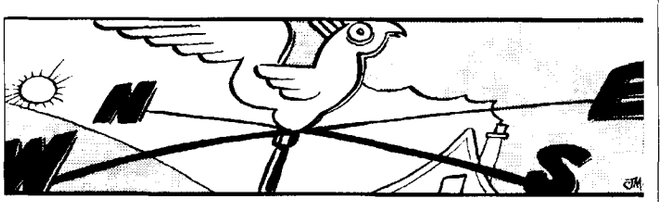

Colin Ward stumbles on melons in a green girdle

We called unexpectedly on Peter Wolf at his *Schrebergärten*, or allotment, on the fringe of Cologne's Green Girdle, at Rodenkirchen. He insisted that we sat, under a canopy of vines, dripping with ripening grapes, outside his self-built wooden chalet. This has two rooms, a WC and even a cellar (for the storage of root crops). He plied us with fruit and pulled some young carrots for our one-year-grandchild to gnaw, and we couldn't leave without bags full of salad for our journey.

Yes, he explained, he supplies all his family's needs from the 350 square-metre plot that he has had for 40 years, and gives away much more. The rent is now 150 marks, or £60 a year. Naturally, I reflected on the depressed condition of the allotment movement in Britain, the fact that allotments are under threat all over this country because of the incentive to local authorities to sell off land for "development", as well as the fact that Peter Wolf's chalet would be seen as a gross infringement of our planning and building legislation.

Peter has no such worries. First, because gardening has a different status there, where it is taken for granted that allotment-holders need to have the comfort of something more than a toolshed. Second, because of the "green girdle".

Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) is not remembered very much in contemporary Germany, except in his own city. He was the first postwar federal chancellor, elected—at over 70, austere and unbending—precisely because he was the only major conservative politician who was completely untainted by compromises with the Nazi regime, which he despised. In Cologne, the city where he was lord mayor after the first world war and before 1933, he is recalled with gratitude. For it was he who introduced the "Lex Adenauer" after 1919, establishing the green girdle, which can now be enjoyed in its maturity.

His advisers were influenced by Ebenezer Howard's garden city idea and by Raymond Unwin's *Town Planning in Practice*, of 1909. Unlike Adenauer, Unwin had no power, but tried very hard to exercise an influence. In 1929, the minister of health, Neville Chamberlain, appointed him as technical adviser to the Greater London Regional Planning Committee. He personally subsidised the committee's report in 1933, advocating a "green girdle" for London and "complete industrial garden cities" beyond it.

Neither government nor local authorities were at all interested, but his ideas were taken up again by Patrick Abercrombie in the wartime Greater London Plan, and subsequent legislation. Green belts in Britain owe their existence to a pronouncement called Circular 42 of 1955.

We know all about their disadvantages, and how they have been punctured by motorway developments like the M25, as well as their effect on property speculation beyond the fringe. Peter Hall's magisterial study of the *Containment of Urban England* cited a minister who said long ago that green belts may not be at all useful or beautiful, and may indeed not be very green, "but without them the town would never end; the very essence of the green belt is that it is a *stopper*."

It's like that around Cologne. In some places, the green girdle is a narrow, intensely wooded tree barrier; in others, it widens to include reservoirs, playing fields and allotments. It, too, has been pillaged to make room for motorways. But several generations of tree-planting, and the sheer effect of time, have made the green girdle sacrosanct. No speculative developer would dream of pushing in a planning application for a more "useful" and lucrative use of that land.

We're different in Britain. You can't have a chalet like Peter Wolf, but you can try very hard to persuade the planners that an out-of-town hypermarket, or, of course, a hotel associated with a golf club, is an absolutely reasonable encroachment.

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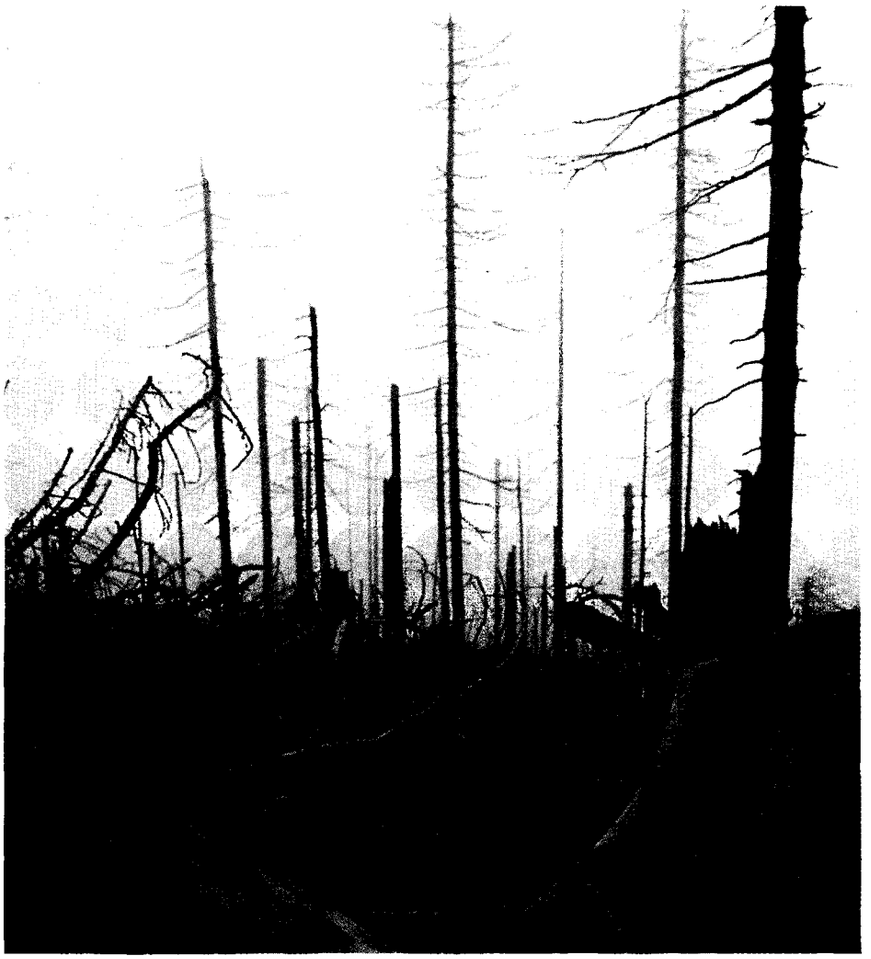

The second Sulphur Protocol: a start, but it leaves 7 per cent of Europe unprotected

Britain and a few other western European nations are holding up a vital agreement to curb the destruction of Europe's ecosystems by acid rain, writes **Christer Ågren**

The acid test

Last week in Geneva, international negotiators failed to reach a new agreement to curb acid rain. The main reason was the reluctance of some western European countries, among them Great Britain, to commit themselves to the needed reductions in sulphur emissions.

It is now more than 20 years since acid rain was put on to the international environment agenda. Fourteen years have passed since the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution was signed by all countries in Europe and North America and eight years since the first Sulphur Protocol, the signatories of which undertook to reduce their sulphur emissions by at least 30 per cent by 1993, as compared to the base year 1980. Among the big emitters in Europe, only the UK, Poland and Spain failed to sign. Britain's refusal to join the so-called 30 per cent club earned it the tag of "dirty man of Europe".

When the protocol was signed in 1985, it was widely recognised that this was only a first step, and that much bigger reductions would be necessary. In fact, the deterioration of the environment will not stop until depositions are reduced to below the "critical loads". The critical load is a scientifically derived and agreed figure on the maximum amount of pollution—in this case sulphur—that different ecosystems can tolerate without adverse effects. Today, some ten countries are unilaterally aiming at halving, or more than halving, their sulphur emissions by the mid-1990s. But without further action, by the year 2000 more than a fifth of Europe's ecosystems will still suffer from excess sulphur deposition.

As the first Sulphur Protocol comes to an end, negotiations for a second Sulphur Protocol, this time based on critical loads, are now under way. The eventual long-term aim is that the critical loads should not be exceeded and the gap between current deposition levels and critical loads fully closed. The second Sulphur Protocol being negotiated in Geneva last week, which aimed at closing the gap by 60 per cent, is but the first step in that direction.

In environmental terms, this step is not an ambitious one, unless the reductions needed to fulfil that target are achieved within the next few years. It would still leave 7 per cent of Europe's ecosystems unprotected. More than one-fifth of the ecosystems would still be exposed to excess deposition in several countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Norway, and the former Czechoslovakia.

At earlier meetings, a majority of the negotiating parties had agreed in principle that the countries of western Europe were to meet their targets by the year 2000, while eastern Europe could be given an extra five years, that is until 2005. At last week's meeting, most countries presented figures on what they are prepared to do. Many seemed willing to commit themselves to the sulphur reduction targets, based on figures from computer models, that were allocated to them. These describe what is needed in order to go 60 per cent of the way towards closing the gap between critical loads and deposition levels. There were a number of notable exceptions: in particular the UK, but also France, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, and Ireland.

Britain, for example, is expected to reduce its own emissions by 79 per cent by 2000, but would only commit itself to 70 per cent by 2005. The difference of 9 per cent may appear small, but it relates to the UK's 1980 emission level of 4.9 million tonnes. Therefore, in practice, it amounts to some 440,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide. This equals the emissions from the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, and Norway added together. (These countries have already reduced their emissions by between 60 and 80 per cent from their 1980 levels.)

In order to achieve that "extra" 9 per cent reduction, Britain would probably need to return to the clean-up programme it agreed to initially—of retrofitting 12 gigawatts (GW) of coal power stations with flue-gas desulphurisation (FGD). At present, Britain is only constructing or planning the retrofit of 8 GW of stations with FGD.

It is worthwhile noting that some central and eastern European countries have proposed substantial emission reductions, despite the considerable challenges faced by economies in transition. For example, the Czech and Slovak Republics aim for 60 and 65 per cent respectively, Poland for 47 per cent, and Bulgaria for a 49 per cent reduction—all by 2005. Obviously, with some support from the west, they could do even better. These efforts are greatly encouraging, and are in great contrast to those western countries able, but unwilling, to shoulder their fair share of emissions reductions.

Bearing in mind the probable failure of

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some countries to live up to the reductions necessary to meet the 60 per cent gap-closure target, in Europe as a whole the protection for its ecosystems achieved by 2000 would be only 1 per cent more than on current reduction plans, and the overall sulphur reduction would barely improve. A new protocol, based on the proposals made last week, would therefore be widely recognised as a failure.

Most countries now agree that the new protocol should include mandatory BAT-standards (Best Available Technology) for new major emission sources. However, the emission limits proposed are largely similar to those contained in the 1988 European Community directive on large combustion plants (LCPs), according to a representative of the EC Commission, and reflect the technical level of the early 1980s. Such standards will, therefore, mainly contribute to emission reductions in central and eastern European countries. For the future, the commission is now undertaking a review of the LCP directive, and is expected to propose a tightening-up next year. This could, therefore, contribute to some emission reductions in the western European countries.

The US and Canada are also members of the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution, but these two countries have unfortunately succeeded only in muddying the waters of these negotiations. Referring to their bilateral acid rain agreement of 1991, they appear to wish to sign the new protocol with no new obligations whatsoever. Not only that, the US has even made efforts to undermine the basic foundation of the protocol, by proposing to take out the fundamental point—that the ultimate aim is to reduce depositions to below critical loads—from the basic obligations of the text.

For a long period, there has been a general agreement that new protocols under the convention should be based on a scientific effects-based approach—the critical loads approach. There have been five years of hard work to gather data and establish this new scientific framework on which to base environmental protection.

This work could bear fruit in the very near future, if sufficient pressure is exerted on those countries that currently have backed out of their required commitments. A draft text should have been agreed at last week's meeting, and the new protocol signed by ministers in early December. Now there will have to be an extra negotiating meeting in the first week of November, and the new protocol is expected to be ready for signing by next spring.

The challenge is to ensure the new protocol does not repeat the mistakes of the first. All countries have embraced the effects-based approach in principle; now each must sign up in practice to what that entails. It is, therefore, vital that countries do not back away from full implementation of the target: reduction of the gap between critical loads and present levels of acid deposition, on a rapid timetable, by 60 per cent.

Christer Ågren is director of the Swedish NGO Secretariat on Acid Rain

GREEN GAUGE

Vicky Hutchings went to the British Association's annual meeting, and learned the finer points of sewage control

The British Association's annual jamboree this year was deep in shit. From exciting papers on "New Perspectives in Sewage Sludge Treatment" to the slightly worrying "Sewage Sludge: An Unstoppable Product of Our Civilisation", one need never have left the subject. There was even something for Prince Charles, "Reed Beds for Sewage Treatment", in which I learned a new term: "effluent polishing".

One of the most interesting talks was given by John Tyson, environment protection manager at North West Water, on managing urban drainage. Tyson is an expert on the history of the sewer. Slide after slide of crumbling red-brick Victorian sewers testified to his enthusiasm for the subject. But Tyson is in no doubt that the sewerage system we have today is completely ridiculous: "A human being produces about 1lb of solid waste a day. It's transported across long distances using masses of water. The pipes alone need *enormous* amounts of money to maintain them. You get the stuff to a treatment plant, which takes up a large area of land and which nobody wants to live next door to. All this just to take that bit of solid out of the water again."

Yet we've got to this position quite logically: "The system in its present form evolved through a series of expedient steps, each designed to overcome a particular problem." The downside was that each solution produced another problem. The first sewers were built because, as conurbations and the number of roads increased, streets flooded when it rained. Piped water was introduced "to prevent outbreaks of water-borne diseases arising from the contamination of wells by seepage from cess-pits". So far, so good.

However, the existence of running water led to the invention of the water closet. The problem was that this ensured a much greater amount of liquid, which led to cess-pits overflowing into the sewers. Human excrement was now pouring through the pipes directly into rivers. Something had to be done. And it was: "the construction of interceptor sewers discharging to sewage treatment plants". And that is why we have the system we have.

It seems likely, said Tyson, that on the whole this is what we'll stay with. Notwithstanding the comeback of waterless toilets like the Clivus (see Green Gauge, 16 April), these are unlikely to escape from their role as summer additions in parks and seaside resorts. After all, it always costs less to tinker with what you've got than to start afresh.

What Tyson worries about is exporting this system to the developing world, where clean water is often at a premium, and resources could be better used. In Britain, 32 per cent of our piped water is flushed down the toilet.

Last year in Morocco, I was amazed by how this dry, desert country could provide so many enormous swimming-pools, luxuriant gardens, flush toilets and bathrooms-en-suite in all the hotels. Attracting tourists in ever greater numbers is one of the ways hot and poor countries have to earn hard foreign currencies. Unfortunately, flush toilets, like cars and TVs, are now on the shopping-list of anyone who aspires to a western lifestyle.

North West Water now has a team in Mexico City, where the demand for water has been growing apace: enough to ensure that the aquifer that supplies the capital with most of its water runs out by the year 2000, if the abstraction rate remains the same. So the company is helping to put off that evil day by building a more leak-proof system and installing meters to discourage overuse of water. Whether this will be enough for the aquifer to regenerate is another matter.

There is no doubt that, in the rich north, we can improve on what we have. Tyson, together with Professor M B Beck, from Imperial College, and Professor A J Saul, from Sheffield University, is researching urban drainage in the UK. One of their findings is that better urban design could reduce run-off rates of rainfall. This would have two advantages: it would reduce the cost of providing waste-water treatment, and more rain would fall directly on to the land, where it could play its part in the greening of our cities.

But it looks as if one must go to Japan to find the cutting-edge of sewage control. The Japan Aqua-Renaissance Project is currently doing a feasibility study on the creation of large numbers of smaller treatment plants, possibly even one for a single block of flats. Only fresh drinking-water would be piped directly to your tap. A closed system would allow the use of water for the usual facilities. But the mixture would be recycled. The end products would be methane gas and fuel oil—and re-usable water, which would go round again, topped up when necessary.

One day, perhaps, we could get back to dealing with our sewage near the point of creation, segregating the waste from rainfall, and keeping transportation and water-use to a minimum. In the rich, rainier countries, however, there will be little pressure to do more than the research. The relevance of these new technologies are for the developing world, where, as Tyson says, the imposition of Victorian engineering would be a disaster.

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REAL PROBLEMS FALSE SOLUTIONS

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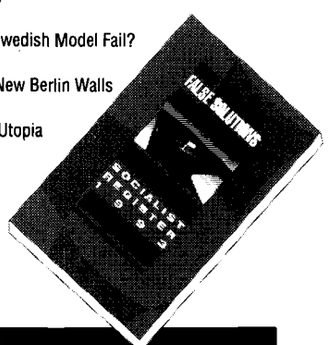

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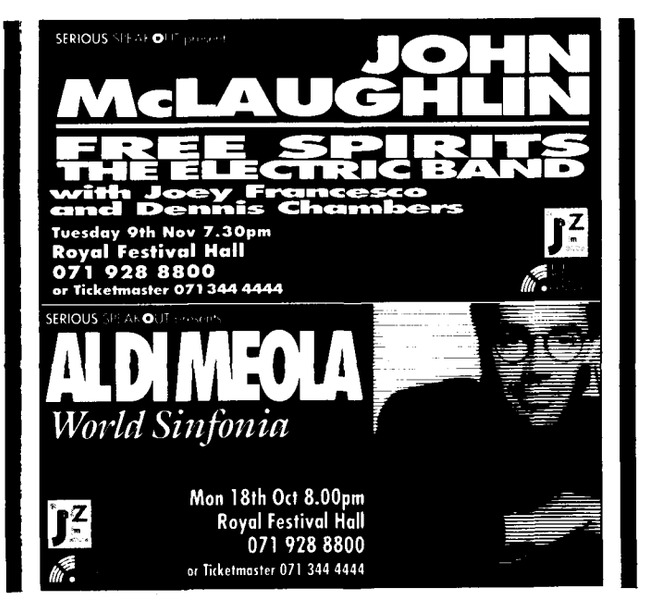

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Something queer is going on in advertising, as the male body turns into an all-purpose object of desire. **Mark Simpson** reports

Hairy fairies

Later this month, those promoters of baby oil and housewife hysteria, the Chippendales, will launch their latest UK tour. Chances are that at some venues, their fans will find themselves queueing beneath a hoarding promoting orange juice with yet another immaculate young man wearing nothing more than a sparkly posing pouch and a smile.

The Britvic Fairy Show has already been playing nationwide for several weeks, turning more than a few heads on the bus. But apart from brightening up some rather dull articles in the broadsheets on a hoped-for upturn in the fortunes of the British advertising industry, the Britvic fairy phenomenon has been left largely unexplained. What exactly was Howell Henry Chaledcott Lury, the agency responsible, hoping that the fairy would do for them?

"We wanted the ad to do three things," reveals Sarah Smoxall, account director with HHCL. "Reinforce the message that we put 12 oranges in every packet, appeal to women, and stand out and be noticed." All Ms Smoxall's wishes have been granted, and much more besides. Like all the best advertising, the Britvic fairy is more than just the sum of the ad agencies' intentions. The fairy, like the Chippendales, announces to the world that something quite astonishing has happened to the way we look at the male body.

Not all men are happy with that message. Philip Norman, writing in the *Weekend Guardian* recently, made a desperate protest about what he saw as the confusion of modern sexual semiotics. In fact, this lamented "confusion" of sexual signals was really about the demise of the coding of active desire as inherently masculine: "The message that men no longer call the sexual shots is everywhere," he wailed. For Norman and men like him, the Britvic fairy must be a monstrous and mocking incarnation of all their deepest anxieties.

And they would be right to fear this fairy. For all its soft focus, campery and glamour, the Britvic fairy is a stark image of the male body as passive object of active female desire; literally, a male fantasy figure existing only for the female voyeur. But it's merely the latest in a flood of images of men's bodies, beginning with Nick Kamen's over-thorough visit to the launderette with his Levis in 1985.

In Britain at least, advertising invented male stripping, the premise of which is that the male body exists as a thing to be looked at, a commodity selling commodities from jeans and aftershave to meat and ice-cream. It has become commonplace to witness naked male flesh that betrays hundred of hours of passionate narcissistic devotion in gymnasia calling down from the billboard: enjoy this product, enjoy *me*.

Even more alarming for Norman and his mates must be the realisation that, although the avowed target of much of this advertising is women, heterosexual desire is not preserved. The images of men's bodies that glow around us are available for the enjoyment of everyone: female *and* male, hetero *and* homo. These images are rather "queer"; that is to say, the desire they signal is undifferentiated. Sexual difference no longer calls the shots, "active" no longer maps automatically on to "masculine", nor "passive" on to "feminine". This is the Britvic fairy's ironic spell: the traditional symbol of unmanliness, the fairy, is transformed with a wave of his wand into a symbol of desirability, a paradigm of what a man might be.

In fact, the fairy is more an androgynous angel, an iconic blend of masculine and feminine ideals. He is the Greek "beautiful boy" who, according to Camille Paglia, is "one of the west's great sexual personae . . . The beautiful boy is an androgyne, luminously masculine and feminine. He has a male muscle structure but a dewy girlishness." So it comes as no surprise to hear from Smoxall that, in audience tests, the ad provoked the enthusiastic response from women that the young man was "like a Greek god".

Look closer and you can see that the fairy has what Paglia describes as a distinctly ancient Greek face: "high brow, strong straight nose, girlish fleshy cheeks, full petulant mouth, and short upper lip". That the artists responsible for this image are Pierre et Gilles, famous for their camp homoeroticism, should come as no surprise either. The beautiful boy in western art is a homosexual creation and his face has persisted throughout its history. Like homoeroticism, it was never entirely extinguished by Christianity: "It is the face of Elvis Presley, Lord Byron and

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Bronzino's glossy Mannerist blue boy."

The essential paganism of desirable male forms is well understood by Pierre et Gilles. What are fairies if not pagan gods, miniaturised to avoid detection by the priests—and also, it would appear, by advertisers? Hence the remarkable fashion—mania, even—for naked male torsos in a self-consciously Graeco-Roman pose selling aftershave last Christmas; an image adopted by so many that it was impossible to tell them apart. Even the names spoke in similar pagan accents: Davidoff, Anteaus, Xeryus.

And at the symbolic centre of paganism you find the phallus. The rediscovery of the male body in advertising is also about the rediscovery/uncovering of the phallus, sign of power, desire, health. In pagan times, the phallus was considered to have magical powers, proved by its ability to catch, enchant and draw the eye; it was reproduced in wall paintings and on pottery. The Roman god Fascinatus, origin of the word "fascinating", was represented by an erect phallus worn around the neck as a lucky charm.

Advertising, which in the modern world has replaced art and religion, also knows the worth of things that catch and enchant the eye. Until the 1980s, this was the exclusive role of women: representing the phallus for men as things to be possessed by them. But the appearance of the body-built male nude has meant that the phallus is now also represented by the male body. So much so that the effect can be hysterical. The torso aftershave ads, with their removal of head, arms and legs, self-consciously presented the male body as a giant penis: hard, smooth and pumped up.

But as taboos about the phallus wane, the phallus itself is beginning to edge closer and closer into frame. In addition to the young white rap star Marky Mark's famous poster for Calvin Klein underwear, in which he grabs his precocious package through Mr Klein's white cotton, there is the Britvic fairy's endowment, which sorely tests his jockstrap. This is, of course, the message of the ad: 12 oranges/12 inches crammed into a unfeasibly small space. His pouch hovers aptly over the word "cram".

Not only is the eye enchanted, but the orange juice, like Calvin Klein's briefs, is associated with the phallus itself. The fairy's wand in his right hand is a joke: superfluous, except as an ironic underlining of the observation that all the magic and fantasy lies between his legs.

But however much changes, it seems unlikely that advertisers will ever actually show the phallus. By withholding it at the very moment of appearing to offer it, they always leave the punter wanting more and inclined to confuse the product with what they are missing. Like the Chippendales, they know that their business is all about tease. After the dick flops out, the curtain comes down.

The Chippendales tour starts in Glasgow on 20 September. Mark Simpson's "Male Impersonators: men performing masculinity" will be published soon by Cassell

Steve Beard looks into the fatal attraction that links movies and drugs

Shots of the devil's needle

Damned junkies: the addict suffers again in "A Hatful of Rain"

High School Confidential is the kind of movie that David Lynch would love. Made in 1958 by the redoubtable Jack Arnold, it purports to show how the introduction of a simple stick of marijuana into a middle-American high school transforms the place into a teenage vice den.

See that sweet-looking bobby soxer? She is really a dope fiend who would sell her soul for one more hit. And what about that black-clad hep cat? By night, he's a sinister pusher intent on the moral corruption of his classmates. It's David Lynch without the irony. About the only surprise in this hysterical anti-drugs movie is that its protagonist—a finger-snapping delinquent who smokes dope in the principal's office and shakes hands with a flick-knife—is revealed to be an undercover narcotics cop.

Thirty-five years later, this would all be hilarious if it wasn't still pretty much gospel. *Joint Ventures: Hollywood and Drugs*, a season of 12 movies being screened at the NFT, is remarkable for the way it dramatises a consistent approach to the topic of drugs across a wide range of genres and periods. From D W Griffith's 1919 melodrama, *Broken Blossoms*, to the contemporary blaxploitation movie, *New Jack City*; from the 1957 problem picture *A Hatful of Rain*, to the more recent cops-on-dope thriller, *Rush*, the myths remain the same.

The American writer Avital Ronell has argued that the whole idea of "addiction" to "drugs" is locked into a metaphysical fantasy of a pure or uncontaminated state of being that has no real existence outside of Foucauldian regimes of normalisation. Which pretty much sums up the trajectory of the American puritan experience: the gift of a second Eden, betrayed by the inevitable fall from grace. According to this mythic framework, "drugs" (like "communism" before it) is merely the latest secular name for the old adversary. The 1916 film paired with the 1928 urban morality tale, *The Face That Kills*, says it all. Its title is *The Devil's Needle*.

All the films in the season restage a puritan psychodrama of sin and redemption, with the accent falling heavily on punitive suffering. There are three big myths to contend with. The first is the myth of addiction as enslavement, of dope as both the price and reward of a Faustian pact. The 1936 propaganda flick, *Reefer Madness*, is the most obvious, what with its absurd claims that smoking marijuana leads to sexual frenzy and beserk violence, but *New Jack City* takes exactly the same line on the diabolical powers of crack cocaine. Suddenly, *High School Confidential* doesn't seem so camp.

The second big myth is the one that justifies, and even sanctifies, the life of the junkie. It suggests that coming off heroin is equivalent to the torments of the damned, that the withdrawal symptoms that punctuate the junkie's ritual progress are so many signs of martyred affliction. The culprits here are not hard to find. Not only is there Frank Sinatra climbing the wall in a locked hotel room as he kicks his habit cold in the 1955 problem picture, *The Man with the Golden Arm*. There is Don Murray twitching whenever he can't get a fix in *A Hatful of Rain* and Jason Patric chewing the carpet in *Rush*. The one thing you can say

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in mitigation of these episodes is that they coincide with the only instances of conventional "bad acting" in each film.

Then there is the myth of the pusher as Mephistophelian dark angel, an evil seducer who corrupts the innocent with the offer of forbidden fruit. Often, this shades into racist stereotype. There is more than a hint of the Asiatic Jew in the characterisation of "Snowy the Peddler" in *The Face That Kills*. With his hook nose and black eyes, he slinks around the department stores and rooming houses of the film's Big City like the original snake in the grass.

More often, the pusher is condemned, sometimes glorified, as a monster. Al Pacino as the vicious Cuban coke baron, Tony Montana, in Brian De Palma's *Scarface* is an appallingly charismatic figure. But Wesley Snipes' flash urban kingpin in *New Jack City* isn't far behind.

None of these films is willing to deal with the mechanics of supply and demand in the drugs business without resort to heavily moralised stereotypes. The pusher as the mythic author of natural depravity is as far as the analysis gets. On the rare occasions it goes any further, it stops at the North American border.

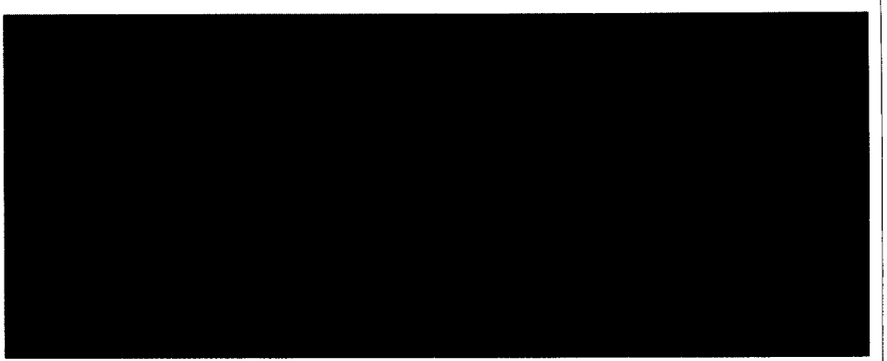
In the doped-out 1960s biker movie, *Easy Rider*, Mexico is where Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda pull off the coke deal that funds their version of the American Dream. Meanwhile, Al Pacino's Tony Montana tracks in from Cuba at the start of *Scarface* before meeting his nemesis in the form of South American narco-assassins.

What you would never know from any of these movies is that, at the turn of the century, cocaine and heroin were openly available in drug stores in all the big industrial cities. They may not have been morally respectable, but they certainly weren't socially outlawed. A trip to a Chinese opium den in those days probably carried as much of a stigma as a visit to one of the smoke-filled nickelodeons springing up all over urban America in converted pawn shops and amusement arcades. All this makes the appearance of the stereotypical opium den in *Broken Blossoms* and *The Face that Kills* a skewed tale on the class origins of the cinema.

Hollywood and drugs probably have more in common than is realised. Quite apart from the fact that the logistics of modern movie-making depend for their success on a whole variety of different boosting agents, the finished product of any Hollywood deal has often found itself skirting the categories of psychopathological behaviour typically reserved for "drugs".

Alcohol was banned in the US in 1920, marijuana in 1937—both as a result of the usual myth-mongering puritan hysteria. Hollywood should think itself lucky that the introduction of the Hays Code in 1930 was as far as the mania for prohibition went. Otherwise we might think of "movies" as a controlled substance to rank with dope or junk.

"Joint Ventures" continues at the NFT to 30 September



On being blue: the backdrop for Derek Jarman's twilight thoughts

Jonathan Romney follows Derek Jarman to the limits of sense—and of cinema

Living colour slowly fades

Throughout the duration of Derek Jarman's *Blue*, there's nothing to look at but a single shade of blue. Deep and rhythmic, it's the same blue, or as close as celluloid can get, as the colour patented by the French artist Yves Klein. Watch this single shade for the film's 76 minutes, and a strange optical effect takes hold as the screen pulses, shimmies, reveals elusive shapes and dimensions. Theorists insist that in any film you see what you want to see, that the only real projections on the screen are those of the viewer's desire. For once, it's true. In this film, it's all in the eye of the beholder.

Blue is not some sort of conceptualist prank to be read separately from the canon of Jarman's "real" films. He hasn't chosen to show it as a gallery installation; instead, it's screening at the MGM Panton Street from 10 September, and on 19 September will be shown on Channel 4 with a simultaneous broadcast of the soundtrack on Radio 3. It is certainly a work that demands to be seen, quite literally; it needs the viewer to complete its fabrication.

See it in the cinema if you can: partly because otherwise you'll miss the full intensity of the blue, partly because the film so directly addresses the primal cave-dweller in every cinema-goer. Here the feeling of sitting in the dark bombarded with blue radiation on a big screen is as close as cinema gets to sensory deprivation—which paradoxically becomes the opposite, sensory over-stimulation.

Blue is simultaneously easy and nigh-impossible to describe. It's a blue screen, but what's happening? Here, the question to ask is one that's usually elided: what's it like to watch this film? "Watching" becomes a rather different experience, at once active and passive. You work to make sense: to assimilate this rather demanding experience and perhaps even to stay awake. But you also accept that your attention will fade in and out, as your own associations take you elsewhere. That drifting vision is an inescapable part of watching *Blue*.

Even if you're not a Jarman acolyte, the film is readable, for all its abstraction. What unifies it is Jarman's own presence as speaking voice, as writing self, as autobiographical subject. The voices that speak and sing in *Blue*—in a complex sound patchwork designed by Marvin Black—are not always Jarman's own. The others are John Quentin, Tilda Swinton and Nigel Terry, but they always seem to be delegates of the Jarman "I".

This is a dislocated "I" that comes to us in a series of verbal and musical fragments. They take in impressionistic musings on the colour blue, mythical and pastoral evocations of a hero named Blue—a lost love? an idealised blue-eyed blue-jean boy?—and anecdotes that could be fresh from the film-maker's diary.

The anecdotes mainly concern Jarman's treatment for symptoms related to HIV. Just as a single colour fills the screen and creates a multiplicity of colour metaphors in the text, HIV becomes the repeated subject that preoccupies Jarman: a single theme round which a multiple self revolves.

The idea of imminent death haunts the work in a very concrete, painful way. It's there in a long, discomforting litany of physical reactions to the drug DHPG, in a sardonic musing on the futility of buying new shoes. Blue itself becomes the colour of death, the "blue-bearded reaper", and of the electro-physical charge that attaches to the death-haunted body in a "blue funk". Above all, it is the colour of a change in vision: the flash on the film-maker's eyes as doctors carry out tests on his failing retinas.

This film is an attempt to communicate what, for a film-maker, could be considered as serious as death itself: the crisis of vision. "If I lose half my sight," Jarman asks, "will my vision be halved?" The film is a wager on the possibility that a wilfully assumed constraint of the palette might paradoxically make for an amplified vision. "If the doors of perception were cleansed," the film says, "then everything would be seen as it is."

There's an element of mysticism in this utopian notion, which draws on one of the recurrent paradoxes of modern art. What is

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said when there's nothing on the canvas? Blank, or near-blank paintings have frequently risked the banal to get at the transcendental (Yves Klein, but especially Barnett Newman, a painter obsessed with the idea of the sublime).

In *Blue*, Jarman is after nothing quite so abstract. The film attempts to evoke a particularly lucid, uncluttered view of things as they are. It conveys a sense of a subjectivity at once in retreat from the contingent world and shackled within the too, too solid prison of a body. There's a shocking passage when he meets young Bosnian refugees and then remarks: "What need of so much news from abroad while all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within me?"

It's hard to know how to take this: an admission of despairing fatigue? A solipsistic self-aggrandisement, identifying his body as the locus of all earthly suffering? A feeling of impotence, of the impossibility of being at once in the world and in one's self? This is a feeling that we come to share while watching *Blue*. We sense that we too have retreated into our own confines and that the world ceases to exist, simply because it can no longer be referred to in the usual cinematic way.

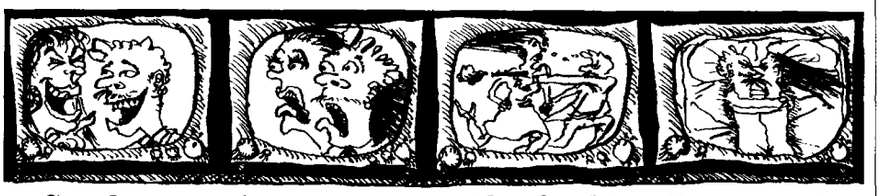
This hardly makes *Blue* a non-political film—and why assume that films informed by Aids must be "political" in a narrow sense? The political voice is one of the voices that run through the film, but it's not a palatable voice of reassurance.

Jarman remarks on the slogan "Living With Aids": "The virus was appropriated by the well—so we have to live with Aids while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine-dark sea." Together with this awkward verbal excess comes a more straightforward refusal of stiff upper lip "courage". Some of the film's voices defy easy approval, but that's part of its refusal to pin itself down. One song cuts rudely through the generally sweet ambience of the music soundtrack: a braying chant in which a football chorus roars its own evasion of definable identity: "I am a cock-sucking/Straight-acting lesbian man/With . . . Spunky sexist desires/Of incestuous inversion and incorrect terminology."

Blue may be a boldly literal contemplation of the void, but it's also about a film-maker staking everything on an attempt to see what film can deliver when all its contingent pigments are washed away. It gauges the possibility of retaining faith in the image even when the image has been reduced to its most intangible.

We shouldn't be tempted, as we often are when faced with radically different films, to say that, after this, films will "never be the same again". Because of its radicalism, *Blue* can be only a marginal attempt to rethink cinema. But radical it certainly is: an attempt at a *tabula rasa* and a call to re-vision the world in images that are genuinely personal and stripped of extraneous visual "noise". Here's where the political and mystical meet, in Jarman's injunction: "Thou shalt not create unto thyself any graven image, although you know the task is to fill the empty page."

JACI STEPHEN



Sunday morning goes pop as the Cooking Canon and holy friends brighten up the Lord's Day

Becky from London was on the line. Why, she wanted to know, did people in Biblical times hear God's voice more clearly than people do today? This was a tough one for Martin. He had already survived the question of how to focus during prayer time: "The more you struggle, the tighter it gets . . . it's like Muhammed Ali, riding the punches".

But Becky wasn't the kind to be fobbed off with metaphors. Suddenly, Martin clutched his stomach. The paramedics were probably halfway across the studio floor before they realised that this dramatic gesture was all part of Martin's act. "You have to feel it in the base of your *belly*," he enthralled. "What the Old Testament calls your *bowels*." Oh, no, dear me no, Martin. Sunday morning live television isn't a bowel sort of place. Not a bowel sort of place at all.

At least, it wasn't until 5 September. But Martin is one of a new breed of clergyperson who has been wheeled on to ITV to liven up religion (Christianity to be precise; anything else is still a no-no area on the British Sabbath). Hirsute and eager, Martin sets about his task with all the enthusiasm of . . . well, Muhammed Ali riding the punches.

Hosted by Kay Avila and Richard Bath, *Sunday Morning* is a magazine format that aims to sweeten the bitter pill of traditional Sunday religious programmes. Perched on wicker chairs on a set like the Garden of Eden, minus the garden, the pair nod and smile a great deal, rather as you imagine Adam and Eve might have done when they discovered where everything went.

They are, nevertheless, a well-chosen pair, whose down-to-earthness drags the proceedings back from the heavens when the going gets a bit too Godlike for its own good. Richard, for example, was none too impressed with one lady's visit to an Oxfordshire retreat, where people "begin to twinkle again". "All that tranquillity and quiet would drive me potty," he pronounced. Not after two hours of *Sunday Morning* it wouldn't.

Any viewers picked up by this rather jolly first 30 minutes are bound to be lost during the morning service, which only reminds us how boring church really is. Live from Norwich (isn't that a contradiction in terms?), this week's message was all doom, gloom and strife, and the appalling sexism of the Church of England was much in evidence. Only men in frocks were permitted to handle the bread and wine. If you video the whole show, however, you can then fast-forward and cut out the incense wafting and miserable faces in the congregation.

The dodgiest contributor to *Sunday Morning* is Kathleen Lacamera, a Methodist minister who also happens to be a film critic. Her task is to extract anything of ethical or moral significance—no matter how tenuous the connection with religion—from current films, in an attempt to turn them into spiritual works of art and thereby justify her role. Can we look forward to her review of *Jurassic Park* ("Clearly an attempt by the Anti-Christ to take over the earth") and *Much Ado About Nothing* ("Ken and Emma challenge the traditional Adam and Eve Coupling")?

The two real stars of the programme are Baptist minister Steve Chalke and the Cooking Canon, John Eley. Steve comes from the Drs Hilary Jones and Mark Potter mould and is as good an advertisement for Christianity as we're ever likely to see. Look out for a sharp rise in the number of church baptisms. My bath's running even as we speak, Steve.

This week, he was at the Greenbelt Christian Arts Festival, allegedly "a forum for open Christian debate" (Open? Christian? Surely another contradiction in terms). Visitors included T-Bone Rapper "tryna git acrawss the message o' Jesus Christ" and Cliff, who confessed, "I don't come as often as I'd like." The under 21s' tent brought forth some staggering ideas, not least the solution to the Bosnian war: "There should be some other way to talk it out."

"It looked like great fun," said Kay, back in the studio. About as much fun as a plague of locusts, I thought.

The Cooking Canon is from the Keith Floyd school of cookery, but he manages to maintain the manic presentation without dipping into the Communion wine. "You can even get angry with God," he said, encouraging viewers to knead dough for bread. "It's the Second Rising, not the Second Coming," he enthused, displaying a loaf he'd prepared earlier.

As with the film critic, the Cooking Canon has to justify his hobby in terms of his profession. Bread, he explained, had "been the cause of schisms within the chur ch". It's going to be fun watching him struggle with the *coq au vin*.

For next week's show, viewers are encouraged to phone in with questions about pilgrimage. Here's one: how far will the producers have to travel before realising that the only thing spoiling a great religious show is the religion?

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Holiday reading: one of Martin Parr's bittersweet images of the English at play in "Home and Abroad" (Jonathan Cape, £15)

Decline and fall

AFTER THE WAR: THE NOVEL AND ENGLAND SINCE 1945
D J Taylor
Chatto & Windus, £17.99

Valentine Cunningham

D J Taylor is a polemicist whose work the novel-reader opens with expectancy, and the novelist with care. In his marvellously rancorous squib *A Vain Conceit: British fiction in the 1980s*, he came on like the farmer's wife in some whippy Angela Carter update—accusing the mice of blindness and hacking away with a heavy-duty critical carving knife at tales here and heads there.

No soft-soaping reviewer this; and slack reviewing got most of the blame for allowing a sloppy scene to get away with it. That, though, was clearly insufficient by way of explanation for the massive fictional downfall he alleged, and *After the War* agrees.

Responsibility for the present bad state of the English novel is now ascribed to the low and lowering state of England after the second world war. It's England and the English that have gone wrong. So although the sickness of the novel is still my fault as a reviewer, and this magazine's fault for being part of the media conspiracy that promotes lackadaisical fictional procedures, mainly the fault is the time's. Which looks rather like neo-Calvinism to me: a revived predestinarianism, social determinism of the worst sort. It suggests writing is quite at the mercy of history, and rather lets novelists off the hook. As squibs go, this one starts to feel a bit damp; wet even.

"Different is worse" is the theme of Taylor's threnody. He's writing, he admits, "a sort of hopeless love-letter" to the Victorian novelists whose massive, moral, realistic, politically astute tomes, packed with human amplitude, have been superseded by "bastard grandchildren". Kingsley Amis' Jim Dixon, Taylor's great case and symbol of postwar fiction and a rich allegory of assorted degenerations, is not, alas, David Copperfield.

Further along the primrose path, Martin Amis' John Self is not, even more regrettably, *Lucky Jim*. And that's true. A truism, even. But for Taylor, these are the measures of decline, of fall. "We read Dickens and George Eliot at school and we know, just *know*, that no modern writer—certainly no modern *English* writer—can hold a candle to them." And our England is to blame: poor little post-imperial England, low on values, choked by a continuing shabby class system, linguistically etiolated even as it believes itself empowered to talk as dirty as it wishes, short of real liberalism and ideas of selfhood that would guarantee a full humanity and regenerate character on the lines of Victorian fiction. Attlee's England was bad for writing, as was Macmillan's, Wilson's and Thatcher's.

The danger of mere conservative assertion and golden-ageism in all this is marked. Armed with his Dickens and his Trollope as touchstones, Taylor sounds too often less concerned with England that with Little England. Taking cues for decency from Dickensian Orwell is all very well, but also very limited. Is it accidental, one wonders, that Taylor's current picture of the English novel excludes almost everyone with a black or brown face, and that the few immigrant novelists he mentions are described as "emigrant" ones?

This critic's heart is often in the right place, but his analyses aren't always there. It is important, as he says, to outface our fashionable formalists and get to grips with the social connections of modern texts. But we do in the end need deeper analyses, sharper historical perspectives—just more concepts—than Taylor's student handbook style of historical, social and critical summaries and generalisations allows.

Happily, Taylor is, from page to page, commonly neither sloppy nor wet. He clashes tartly with the snobberies and elitisms of the officer-class fictions about the war—Waugh, Powell, Simon Raven, Olivia Manning. He is very good on upper-class renegades and bounders such as Raven and Derek Raymond (and Orwell too, I suppose). He's perceptive and sympathetic on the working-class authors of the 1950s, and nicely harsh with the dribbling liberal fictions of the Margaret Drabble era.

He's strong on the lineaments of Thatcher Man, as well as on the novels of some representative men novelists of Thatcher's time such as Ian McEwan, Michael Dibdin and Nigel Williams. His demonstration of how debilitated fiction is by the absence of agreed centres of value is actually moving. The analysis of the way that the sexual revolution devalued courtship, seduction and adultery as central fictional subjects is impressive indeed. Taylor insists that critics should worry at why current assumptions about how novels should proceed have turned up. His voicing of neglected questions about the way we think about behaviour and being is manifestly important. He has embarked, he makes you feel, on serious and necessary work.

Only embarked, though. These are mere opening shots, as the chapter titles allow: "Figures in a Landscape", "Cross-Currents of the 1950s", "Some Liberal Dilemmas", "Scenes from the Class War". Weighing character and liberalism obviously requires much more about Iris Murdoch. Value and religion cry out for far lengthier consideration. Why are Golding and Greene so excluded?

The story simply peters out before the great mass of contemporary novelists. It must be an accident of personal friendship that makes Antonia Byatt so dominant. Martin Amis, for instance, demands much more room. There's nothing here about Julian Barnes and scores of possible others; only a mention of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson; a mere passing sneer at Graham Swift. And there's no sense of how themes such as the body, the Bible, Auschwitz, history, homosexuality, Aids, neo-feminism, let alone the question of the "new" English (yes, the "emigrant") novelists affect the business of writing now about politics, class, morality, the self.

As for what Taylor ends up praising—the

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carefully small scope of local realism in Piers Paul Read and Carol Birch—these fictional encounters seem the result less of research than of happenstance, the reviewer's patchy luck, what the literary editor put his way. And, of course, it's a most surprising final acceptance of the very diminution that Taylor started off by finding so irksome.

Valentine Cunningham teaches English at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and is a former Booker Prize judge

Rough magic

MY IDEA OF FUN
Will Self
Bloomsbury, £15.99

Elizabeth Young

"Typhoid and swans," said Dr Hannibal Lecter. "Typhoid and swans—it all comes from the same place." Lecter was shaking his fist at the infinite, denying a benevolent deity. Similarly, Will Self's new novel rejects binary oppositions and refuses the easy certainties of good and evil.

My Idea of Fun tells the story of Ian Wharton, a boy with the gift of eidesis, or photographic memory. As a child he comes under the corrupt influence of a man he learns to call the Fat Controller. This person seems to be immortal, and has "awesome, inhuman . . . even godlike" powers. An Edwardian vocabulary and his loud, "fairground barker" personality are strongly reminiscent of the portrait of Aleister Crowley in Anthony Powell's memoirs.

The Fat Controller instructs Ian in magical lore—the tarot, astrology, alchemy, the Kabbalah—while simultaneously deriding them as "a pathetic attempt to use proto-scientific methods to . . . apprehend the transcendent". Ian's eidetic abilities become so pronounced that he is able to enter into his own mind pictures, to experience directly time-travel, telekinesis, teleportation.

Ian is convinced that these powers will cease if he has a sexual relationship; the Fat Controller tells him his penis will drop off if he inserts it into a woman. Depressed, the grown Ian consults a psychiatrist, Dr Gyggle, who initially convinces him that it has all been an elaborate hysteria. Ultimately, however, Gyggle and the Fat Controller are seen to be in league and Ian's soul is lost to the most ferocious Dionysian abandon.

The least charitable reading of this novel would be that Self is no more than an upmarket Clive Barker who has stippled his Faustian horror show with intellectual credibility. Shades of Proust, Nietzsche, Bulgakov, Jonathan Carroll and other restless ghosts twist uneasily in the slipstream of his turbo-charged imagination.

However, the book is not prurient or voyeuristic. Its shocks are relatively mild and its structure seems too complex and deliberate merely to serve some meaningless personal surrealism. It seems more probable that Self is attempting to deal with the precise relationship between the writer and the world; that the book offers a rubric of creativity, with Ian as a blank screen on which is projected a creative psychodrama.

Ian's visual memory can be seen as a cathexis, around which the creative process is organised. It's significant that the first image he conjures up in detail is that of a philosopher. The Fat Controller calls himself a "mage", which seems to refer to image or imagination as much as magic. Ian's corruption into murder and other fine arts is part of the necessary insertion into the cesspool of the imagination, suggesting the utter amorality of the artistic process.

Ian suffers both from being cut off from the world and from being drenched with its imagery. Such feelings, so common to creative neurasthenics, are exacerbated by the contemporary media barrage. So what Ian calls "my calculus of personal ritual" is a way of gaining power over an inchoate and threatening world. His very impotence indicates the way in which novelists are doomed to fuck only the products of their own imagination.

Seen like this, the book becomes a fiendishly clever allegory, a parable for the rites of the imagination. The Fat Controller is, in one incarnation, "The Brahmin of the Banal". He is the evil of banality, and the artist who accepts his most poisonous remedies and follows the darkest road of the imagination loses forever the balm of the ordinary. He is the anima at the centre of all things, a metaphor for the shamanism that can creatively illuminate a prosaic reality.

Ian himself, of course, is not an artist. He is a marketing manager, but his existence—from the sublime to the ridiculous—is like a palimpsest of the authorial imagination. This interpretation becomes harder to sustain when the novel's tone changes and the Fat Controller comes to represent some all-encompassing conspiracy theory of the unconscious. For Ian's wife Jane, the Fat Controller is identified with "the Dionysian other, Pan, Priapus": that sensual and demonic impulse in Self's sinister interpretation of "fun". His vocabulary parallels Self's own use of language. It is described as "an explosion, a lexical flash, irradiating everything in the immediate area with toxic prolixity". His "word-seam" is "the very fount of knowledge itself, a mulchy conceptual bed".

The entire novel suggests a sensibility that, appalled by life and embarrassed by its limitations, has taken refuge in extreme knowingness. It rejects the simple and the innocent in favour of an unemotional complexity, where ideas perform the functions of character. As such, the book is a dark labyrinth, codified by some punk Prospero into an endlessly beguiling theorem of the unconscious. Whether we actually apprehend "the bare-faced cheek of the infinite" or merely the mordant chic of an esoteric jester—*The Tempest* in a teacup—we certainly find ourselves cheek-to-cheek with some very rough magic.

Gut feelings

THE HUNGER ARTISTS: STARVATION, WRITING AND IMPRISONMENT
Maud Ellmann
Virago, £7.99

Janet Barron

Fish and chips, Maud Ellmann observes, are traditionally wrapped in newspaper. Presumably they are not served in this manner at High Table in King's College, Cambridge, though the idea gives one pause for thought. *The Hunger Artists* is a thoroughly modish, post-everything book, of the sort that academics are now supposed to write to boost their research ratings.

It is post-Freudian, post-Lacanian, and packed with references to just about anyone you can think of in a sometimes stimulating density of allusions. On one page, we are given *Clarissa, Wuthering Heights*, Kafka and H-Block prisoners. Anorexia becomes metaphor, and rape a linguistic assault.

Wrapping fish and chips in newspaper, the word "encrypts" the food. After all, "digestion is a kind of fleshy poetry, for metaphor begins in the body's transubstantiations of itself, while food is the thesaurus of all moods and sensations. Its disintegration in the stomach, its assimilation in the blood, its diaphoresis in the epidermis, its metempsychosis in the large intestine; its viscosity in okra, gumbo, oysters; its elasticity in jellies; its deliquescence in blancmanges, its tumescence in the throats of serpents . . . ".

Everything in *The Hunger Artists* is play on words, moving from Adam to the Ancients, the Apocalypse to Eve, from Dickens to Princess Di. The sources (or sauces) are widely drawn, with the names in Rabelaisian profusion: Baudrillard and Borges, Freud and Foucault, Alice Walker, Simone Weil, Naomi Wolf. To read the index is to read the book.

Some of Ellmann's ideas left me unconvinced. She seems to suggest, for example, that *Clarissa* has something in common with Jane Fonda's workout books and the US obsession with the body beautiful. Moving from this to Amnesty International, the IRA and Oxfam (whose posters she finds obscene), the book proceeds by a bewildering variety of clever but often spurious connections.

"Tinknickers Thatcher" is deconstructed with the rather lengthy argument that she didn't have much sex appeal and didn't do a lot for human rights. I didn't really need telling that, or not in so many words. *The Hunger Artists* tries to do too much in too little space, failing to explore the thesis with which it begins: that hunger can be used as a weapon against the self, but also as a political protest. The arguments disappear up their own digestive tract, and leave me wondering what anyone will gain by reading them.

Janet Barron is adapting "Tristram Shandy" for BBC2

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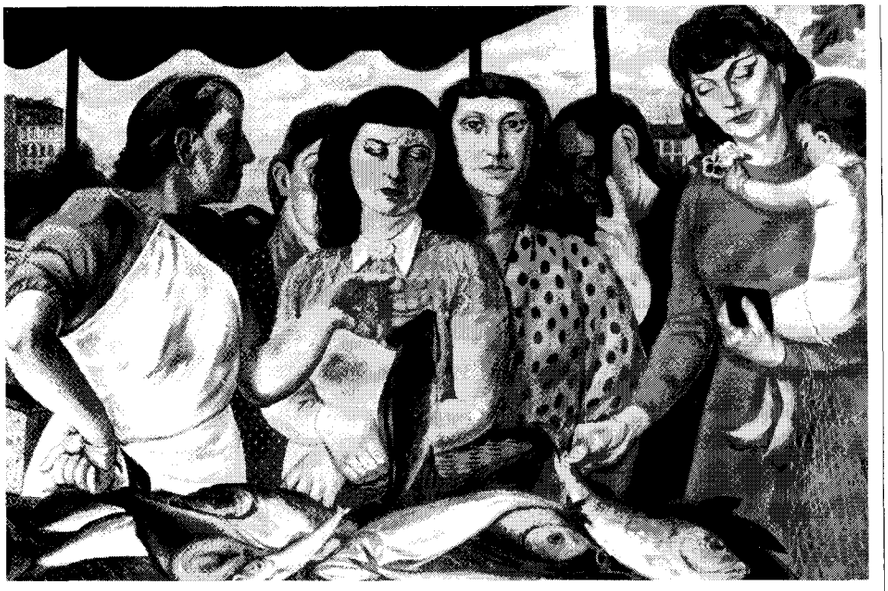

The kind of art that Stalin liked. An example of postwar Socialist Realism by the French communist painter André Fougeron: "Parisian women at the market" (1948), in "Modernism in Dispute: art since the forties" by Paul Wood, Francis Frascina, Jonathan Harris and Charles Harrison (Yale University Press, £14.95/£30)

Rockets in our pockets

THE COLD WAR
Martin Walker
Fourth Estate, £18.99

Maurice Walsh

On a summer evening sometime in the mid-1960s, a man from the civil defence came out from town to our house in rural Tipperary. While chatting to my father about how the weather was holding good for saving the hay, he gave him a booklet that taught us how to protect ourselves in a nuclear war. For a few years, it hung by twine from a nail under the stairs, a position that indicates that it was taken with some seriousness.

The booklet told you what to do if you were out in a field when a nuclear war started (put a scarf around your face, if I recall correctly). There was one illustration I often stared at morbidly, in which a man herding cows was menaced by a haze of red dots representing radiation.

There is a story in Martin Walker's history of the cold war that gives a good idea of where the people saving their hay in Tipperary came into the calculations of the superpowers. It tells of an encounter between Mao Tse Tung and the Italian communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, at a conference in Moscow in 1957. Mao stunned his comrades with, as Walker puts it, his blithe readiness to accept the inevitability of nuclear war and its utility in bringing about the final defeat of capitalism.

Togliatti asked Mao what would become of Italy as a result of such a war. To which Mao replied: "But who told you that Italy must survive? Three hundred million Chinese will be left, and that will be enough for the human race to continue."

The book records the growing distrust between Moscow and Washington after Yalta, the stockpiling of nuclear warheads and the delicate see-saw diplomacy to forestall their use, based on the etiquette that it was as important to save the other side's face as your own. While Khrushchev bargained with Eisenhower and Kennedy, Britain, France and Germany struggled to reconcile their sovereignty with the acceptance of US hegemony. It often came down to the choice summed up by the riposte of Franz Josef Strauss to a left-wing heckler in Bavaria: "I'd rather have Eisenhower's arse than Stalin's face."

Walker, the *Guardian*'s Washington correspondent, has written a resolutely diplomatic history of the exchanges between the great men of the great powers (all men, except for Mrs Thatcher). His narrative is often impressive but it is always straining to include every facet of geostrategy. It rarely ventures beyond the conceits of the foreign policy elite and doesn't combine high politics and low life in the way that, say, Simon Schama has managed. And I wish he didn't try so hard to persuade us that, as the flap asserts, he really did have a ringside seat at the close of the cold war (a footnote to a comment by Thatcher to a news conference in Moscow informs helpfully: "The question was put to Mrs Thatcher by the current author").

But Walker's central thesis is that to talk of military or ideological victory for the west is really beside the point. The lasting achievement of the cold war is the global economy. By supplying the American war effort in Korea, Japan was revitalised, receiving as much money as Germany did from the Marshall Plan. In the US itself, the interstate highway system and the doubling of the number of university students between 1960 and 1970 were strategic decisions of the cold war.

Washington tried to underpin the Pax Americana with an economic system where the dollar ruled, but thus sowed the seeds of its eventual downfall. Huge deficits financed the Vietnam war, Johnson's Great Society and Reagan's rearmament in the 1980s. Walker argues that America did not win the cold war as much as the Soviets withdrew from it. And the Soviet withdrawal was forced at great cost—the imperial overstretch that gloomy American analysts now blame for their decline.

The west prevailed, Walker writes, because its economy proved able to supply guns as well as butter, aircraft carriers and private cars, rockets as well as foreign holidays for an ever-increasing proportion of its taxpayers. Or as President Carter's former national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has written elsewhere: "For the average citizen, the imperatives of consumption are now more important than those of territory or ideology". So it's for this that we had to keep that scary book under the stairs.

Maurice Walsh works for the BBC World Service

Imperfectly disinformed

FREE AGENT: THE UNSEEN WAR 1941-1991
Brian Crozier
HarperCollins, £16.99

Fred Halliday

Brian Crozier subtitles his memoirs "the autobiography of an international activist". He thereby presents himself as some kind of militant, in his case of a right-wing variety, who has been battling away for half a century against the evils threatening our society.

Crozier emerges from these pages as in effect two people. One is a quite able and gifted writer, polyglot and well-travelled, and author of biographies on Franco, de Gaulle and Chiang Kai-Shek. As Graham Greene wrote in a review of one of his books, "Mr Crozier is never dull."

The other Crozier, and the one he chooses to pay greatest attention to here, is a restless purveyor of political gossip and innuendo with some access to the British, French, German and US intelligence services, exaggerating his own importance, forever name-dropping and badgering western governments for more access and money. In sum, Crozier was an international nuisance.

As much as anything, this book is an attempt to settle scores with those in government and media who sooner or later grew tired of his importuning and stopped return-

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ing his calls. Even Margaret Thatcher, in whom he initially had great hopes, seems to have lost interest in him. She rejects his plans for the reorganisation of the British security services and refuses to place a bulk order for one of his books. The Conservative Party can "display" the book, but not buy it, Crozier crestfallenly reports.

Crozier is of course best known for his activities in organising anti-communist and more broadly anti-socialist publishing ventures—the earlier years of *The Economist Foreign Report*, Forum World Features and the Institute for the Study of Conflict—and for his battles with those who exposed the links between these ventures and western intelligence. During the Iranian revolution, for example, he and his associate Lord Chalfont published nonsense about the roles of the KGB and the BBC Persian Service in fomenting the Islamist upsurge.

He is forever sniping at those who revealed the truth about his activities, from *Ramparts* magazine in the US to *Time Out*, the *Guardian* and the *Leveller* here. The valiant work of Phil Kelly, David Leigh and others in removing the veil of neutrality from his operations is sadly recorded.

Crozier has, it would seem, learned little from all this. He still seems happy to assert that people who published things he did not like were acting as agents, conscious or not, of the KGB. He makes the wildest claims about Soviet influence and infiltration in the west, from Roosevelt's adviser Harry Hopkins to Labour MPs in the 1970s. His loathing of the Foreign Office, Chatham House, and so on is obsessive.

As the years go by, Crozier becomes even more paranoid. He argues that Gorbachev's reforms were fraudulent and that the latter's main concern was the reform of Soviet "disinformation". This concept of "disinformation" plays a central role in his story, as it did in many right-wing attacks on independent and socialist analysis of politics during the cold war. Yet those who use it cannot point to any major Soviet successes in this, except by smearing anything critical as a KGB plant.

In retrospect, the most striking cases of false information with political impact originated with the right: the Zinoviev "Letter" in the British election of 1924, the scare tactics in the Italian elections of 1948, the "Missile Gap" in the US presidential election of 1960, and the Reaganite myth of Soviet "superiority" in that of 1980.

Crozier ends on a curious, whingeing note, claiming that the west did not spend as much money defending itself as the Soviet bloc and that it won by default: "During the Cold War, capitalism, by and large, was a toothless tiger on its way to a jungle resting place." What he cannot see is that, under capitalism, the state does not have to spend much money on disinformation and propaganda when a range of other institutions do it for you. If you have the Pope and Murdoch on your side, you do not need the likes of Crozier.

Fred Halliday is professor of international relations at the LSE

Double quits

BIOGRAFI
Lloyd Jones
André Deutsch, £13.99

Julian Duplain

For 40 years, Albania meant Enver. When, as a child, Lloyd Jones heard the crackling anthems of Radio Tirana from his neighbour's shed in rural New Zealand, the announcers offered up every statistical step-forward to the beloved son of the Albanian soil, leader of the world's first atheist state, President Enver Hoxha. Then even the Land of the Eagles fell into line with the east European dominoes. In 1991, the exodus across the Adriatic began in the hope that Italian reality lived up to the adverts on RAI.

Petar Shapello, like thousands of others, joined the visa mêlée at the western embassies in Tirana. But the crowd turned on him, spitting and throwing punches despite his elderly years. In the end, he had to be rescued by a German consular official, the first westerner to hear the curious story of the other Enver Hoxha.

By the time Lloyd Jones tracks him down, Shapello is resting at a former labour camp where the freed inmates are still in residence because they have no other homes to go to. He had been cursed with an uncanny likeness to the president. At his dentist's practice in a remote village, he was talent-spotted one day by the Sigurimi, Albania's omnipresent secret police, and taken to the capital.

After some plastic surgery and a new suit, Shapello was ready to stand in at any rallies or meetings Enver was too busy to attend. His entire life shadowed the leader's. When Enver was ill, Shapello fasted and grew pale; when Enver twisted his ankle, Shapello affected a limp. In his closed cell of a house, Shapello was even denied clothes in case they nurtured what was left of his old personality.

When, after Enver's death, he was turned loose like a pet that no longer delighted its master, he wandered aimlessly across the countryside, sleeping rough in farmyards, scarcely knowing where to turn next. The surprise is that he wasn't shot immediately, as his wife and children had been after his enforced change of career.

The search for Shapello is an intriguing centrepiece to what might otherwise be another doom-and-gloom saga from the poor side of Europe. But unfortunately the old man is confused and reticent after his ordeals and doesn't turn out to be the book's star turn. He is taken back towards his old village, but loses his nerve at the last moment. A nearby town has been submerged behind a hydroelectric dam and Shapello can't bear the risk of any more disappointments. In fact, his village has only the faintest memories of him.

Elsewhere the lives of teachers, factory managers and internal exiles have more to say about Albania's recent history, less grotesque but more revealing than Shapello's peculiar case. The secret police dossiers, in which an uncle's bad record could completely sink a distant nephew, were as thorough and unavoidable as the pre-communist blood feuds. In modern Albania, there is now an extreme version of freedom without bread.

Lloyd Jones chucks it all in without sufficient inquiry, confirming rather than explaining the television shorthand. But here are some strong images of a country suddenly opened up to the world. One man sneaked into Greece, made it to Athens and had the good luck to earn $10 a day jogging around the city in shorts being filmed for a documentary about the origins of the Olympic Games. Ten days later, he walked home, pushing a small fridge on a trolley.

The irony is that so many Albanians have brought back their wealth in domestic appliances that the electricity supply barely lasts an hour or two a day. Better to have stayed at home with a glass of *raki*.

Julian Duplain works for the BBC World Service

Enemy within

THE EYE IN THE DOOR
Pat Barker
Viking, £14.99

Judy Cooke

Pat Barker's sequel to her much-praised *Regeneration* is shockingly good: as powerful an indictment of the first world war as the earlier novel, and further reaching in its analysis of the social and psychological forces that created and sustained the catastrophe.

The fact that real people—Siegfried Sassoon, the psychologist William Rivers—are introduced alongside fictional characters may suggest that the book sets out to convince by a process of historical reconstruction. This is not its method; rather, a sequence of bizarre events and surreal images jolts our imagination into a nightmare world, relived under hypnosis by Major Prior, Barker's protagonist. He remembers the accusing eyeball held momentarily in his palm when a soldier under his command is blown to bits. He shrinks from the painted eye surrounding the spyhole in the door of a prison cell and from the prisoner's accusation ("Whose side are you on?"), since she is Beattie Roper, the woman who helped to bring him up.

Now working for the Ministry of Munitions, Prior has a duty to pursue enemies of the state. In the panicky spring of 1918, the enemies are seen to be pacifists, socialists and homosexuals. Beattie is a pacifist on hunger strike. Her daughter, Hettie, protects Patrick MacDowell, wanted for starting strikes in munitions factories. These are Prior's childhood friends. They know him as the bright boy with ambitions reaching far beyond the

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back streets of Salford. Since he is only "a temporary gentleman", alienated from his fellow officers by class as he is from his ferociously unhappy parents by temperament, there seems no one with an absolute claim upon his loyalties.

Like the double agents in le Carré and Greene, Prior feels that his self-betrayal almost necessitates a subsequent betrayal of others. His bisexuality, vividly expressed in his friendship with another shell-shocked officer, Charles Manning, makes the job of persecuting homosexuals especially repugnant—yet his own protest is a silent one.

Pat Barker compares the historical figure of Robert Ross, attacked by Lord Alfred Douglas during a short-lived scandal, with that of the fictional Major Manning, terrified of blackmail. Her recreation of the 1918 production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, at which both men are present, is a triumph.

Who is to blame for Prior's emptiness, his treachery? Like Dr Rivers, the dedicated healer, he is sympathetic up to a point. But Rivers encourages Sassoon to return to the trenches and Prior, suffering increasingly from bouts of amnesia, "fugue states", has, knowingly or not, betrayed MacDowell. His only defence is one of inheritance. "I was born two years ago. In a shell-hole in France. I have no father." It won't do.

Poet on edge

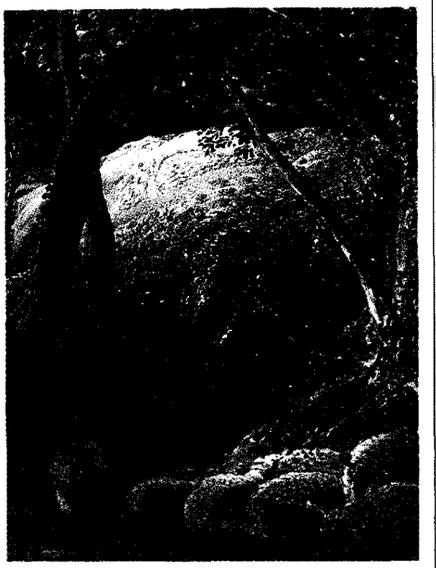
JOHN CLARE: A NOVEL
John MacKenna
Blackstaff Press, £6.95

Kirsty Milne

A good way of wasting time in a public library is to search out the women in biographies of famous men. Examine the index for mention of the subject's wife, mother or sister. They may rate no more than a passing reference, the biographer deeming them to be of marginal interest only. But you, the reader, know from instinct and experience that they must have mattered—and are free to construct an imaginary woman on the basis of a flimsy Christian name.

In his first novel, the Irish journalist John MacKenna reveals himself as a paid-up index-haunter. The troubled life of John Clare, the 18th-century Northamptonshire poet, is recalled by a posse of forgotten female relatives: his sister Sophy, wife Patty and daughter Eliza—plus the fictional Lady Kettering, a composite of Clare's unhelpful upper-class benefactors.

Except for a brief period of novelty value among the London *literati*, Clare never achieved the success promised him by publisher and patrons. Dogged by poverty, he began to suffer delusions, and spent his last two decades in an asylum. The doctor who admitted Clare "had no hesitation in saying that if a small pension could be obtained for him he would have recovered instantly and most probably remained well for life".



Romantic landscape: Samuel Palmer's "Magic Apple Tree" from the cover of "Clare"

Clare's reputation has been constrained by the "peasant poet" tag. In 1975, Edward Bond's play *The Fool* reacted violently against conventional images of a swooning ploughboy writing sonnets to the ragwort. Bond presents Clare as the casualty of a brutal rural environment that is menaced by capitalism and riven by class hatred.

MacKenna's theme is not class brutality but personal sadness. "Always there was a shadow walking between us," says his sister, thinking back to their childhood. His daughter Eliza, trudging to and from the asylum, feels emotionally drained by "the griefs his life created in mine".

The person who emerges with unexpected credit is Clare's wife Patty. A local girl who never learned to read, she had to play second fiddle to the ideal figure of Clare's lost sweetheart, Mary Joyce, who often appears in his poems. In Bond's play, Patty is nagging and literal-minded. MacKenna makes her a loyal realist with strong sensual memories of her husband (she describes an attentive lover who would have made Kinsey proud).

The women are well differentiated, their monologues written with dignity and restrained lyricism. MacKenna does not stress rural poverty as Bond does; but neither does he prettify a world where typhus is common as cowslips. The weak link is Lady Kettering, who is too much the heartless aristocrat, humiliating Clare socially and sexually, correcting his grammar and censoring "sedition" in his poetry.

In the end, these women from the margins of Clare's biography become more vivid than the man in the main text. Clare himself wavers in and out of focus, more an absence than a presence. Through his back-door approach, however, MacKenna has produced an imaginative tribute for Clare's bicentenary. With luck, it should send readers back to the poems themselves.

PRINTOUT

Class action

Boyd Tonkin

When the Booker shortlist appears next week, there's a fair chance that not one of the favoured novels will deal with life in Britain today. The hot tips so far stretch from Canada (Carol Shields) to India (Vikram Seth); from Australia (David Malouf) to Ireland (Roddy Doyle). Likely home-grown contenders dwell in the safely stable past: Pat Barker's "The Eye in the Door", or William Boyd's "The Blue Afternoon".

You will have heard this moan before. So often, in fact, that it's no surprise to find that the rebel forces of BritLit have turned in despair to direct action. Not long ago, literary editors received a blood-curdling manifesto from the self-styled Neoist Alliance. It chucked all manner of curses at genteel authors and publishers, but sweetly pointed out that the rage was directed at hardbacks, not paperback originals.

Adepts of the British samizdat scene will have recognised the hand of Stewart Home. This anarchist, neo-Dadaist and purveyor of spectacularly crude punk fiction has turned himself into the Malcolm McLaren of the literary underground. His latest collection of stories, "No Pity" (AK Press, £5.99), delivers his usual merry blend of cartoon porn, ultra-violence, class hatred and far-left sectarian paranoia.

No Home production would be complete without some ghastly torments for smug gits from the media and book trade. Here, the kinky boss of "Corporate Publishing" comes to a messy end during an SM session; an anarchist mob burns down the Bloomsbury headquarters of "Crud and Crumb Ltd" and a critic is hammered to death.

Readers who share Home's contempt for the arty nomenklatura but can't quite stomach his emetic prose can, rather oddly, find a calmer version of the same views in the saintly Sue Townsend. "Adrian Mole: the wilderness years" (Methuen, £8.99) allows our aspirational hero (now 24) a sexual conquest and some foreign travel as he spurns the DoE and goes to chop veg in a trendy Soho eaterie (for research purposes, of course). Mole a success? Not quite: he's still an unpublished novelist who never gets to the Groucho. The mss of his epic of Leicester realism, "Lo! The Flat Hills of my Homeland", comes winging back from Crud and Crumb—sorry, Faber and Faber.

Perhaps the feebly ambitious Mole and the likes of Ken Knobb—Home's gallery-wrecking anarchist hooligan— have more in common than either would admit. Class friction and cultural anxiety run through daily life in Britain like a twin stream of bile. Both currents flow strongly in Townsend's gentle comedy and Home's seditious pulp. It's only "literary fiction" that fastidiously steps over them.

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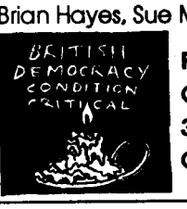

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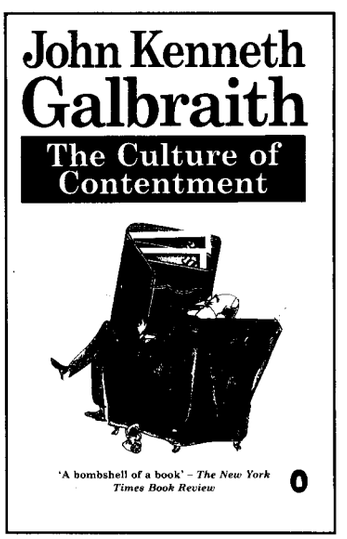

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3293 Set by Eric the Bird
Prose in which every word starts with the same letter.

Report by Ms de Meaner
Hmm! I had intended to compose this report entirely of words starting with the letter Q. But then asked myself, why take the easy way out? But I will report what my friend the typesetter said: "Cursed competition causes comrade chronic choleric cranial cramp." Almost as pithy as George Cowley's entry: "David, dreadfully distressed, drank Dettol, den died." His postscript went as follows: "For Buddha's sake, set something simpler next time." Others who stood out were David Silverman's couple making love ("Oh!" 150 times) and John O'Byrne ("Zzzlumber", Zzzzeitgeist", "Zin-and-zonic", and "Zebra zeminary" among other jewels). The winners can have £12, except Tim Hopkins, who can have a tenner. Books for three year olds don't require the same level of effort, I feel.

Winthrop was woebegone.
"Why?" wondered Wanda. "Witchcraft? Wanderlust? *Weltschmerz*? Which?"
"Worse," wailed Winthrop. "Wagering! Wannabe won. Walkover. Whodunnit was withdrawn. Wanker!"
"Wimp!" Wanda was withering. "Whining's witless. Worse, weak-kneed."
Winthrop winced. Why were wives wearisomely waspish, waging war-games with words?
Wanda waited. "Well?"
"Well what?" Winthrop was wary.
"When's Wetherby?"
"Wednesday week. Why?"
"Wakey-wakey!"
"Wow! *Walpurgisnacht*! Willie Wilkinson with Weight-Watcher!"
"*Wunderbar*!"
"Weight-Watcher will win. Welcome windfall!"
"Wetherby's wontedly wet. Will Weight-Watcher waver?"
"Whizzes when wintry."
"What'll we wear?"
"Wellies; woolly windcheaters; warm waterproofs."
"Where's Wetherby's worthiest watering hole?"
"Wayfarers. Warm welcome; whisky's wonderful."
"Where we'll waste what we've won."
"Whatever we want: waltzing; wassailing; wining; wolfing wallbangers."
"We'll wish Willie well."
"Weight-Watcher will work witchingly with Willie. Wetherby, Wednesday. Wheeeeee!"

Watson Weeks

Friday. Frank "Flatfoot" Ford —Frobishire Force's finest —frequently found free fringe festivals frightful: flea-festooned furry freaks; frayed felt flares; foetid, farty fumes from filthy, faeces-filled facilities; fried foreign food from flaky, frugal folkies; flamboyant frolicking figures fuelling futile, frivolous fun; fearsome fairground felons fleecing finances from fuddled freshmen; fashion-following flocks, flagrantly freebasing; frequent fracas; fakirs; furtive fugitives; frenzied fanatics fit for funny-farms . . . "First formal forum for fucking freaks! Fifteen flaming fields-full!" fumed Flatfoot. Frisking fragrant freeloaders, Flatfoot found four funny fags. "Fancy! Favourite fix, fellows?" fizzed Flatfoot, frogmarching four fraught, flowery figures for fingerprinting far from farmland familiarity. Few forestalled, fearing further friction from formidable Frank's fury. Furthermore, fractious, fraudulent Flatfoot framed five friendly folk flautists for fisticuffs, falsifying farcical facts—"Flashbacks," fibbed Flatfoot flippantly. Formally furious, Flatfoot felt funnily fulfilled. Frank "Flatfoot" Ford—Frobishire Force's finest!

James Mortleman

Henry handled her hair hesitantly, her heavenly honey-hued halo. Heavy, humid heat hampered him. He hung his head. Here, he had hitherto humbly held her hand, honouring her; his Hera, his Helen, his heartbeat. Hotheadedly he had hugged her, hurried her, had her. However, her hurtful humour had humiliated him, her healthy, hearty husband. His honeymoon's halcyon hours had hatched horrors—her hysterical hypertension, her hangovers, her hungry hallucinations, her heroin. Humbling himself, heartbroken, he had heard her horrific hooker's history. How he had hated her! Hardening his heart, he hit her, his hatchet halving her hideous hat, hammering her hypnotically. Huge, heathery, handwoven Hungarian hearthrugs hiding his homicide, he hurried homeward, his handsome head held high, hopefully healed. Heinous happenings, however, herald hagridden hostility. Hereafter humans held him helping hands, hospitalising him; his headless hellcat habitually haunted him.

Alanna Blake

See Sam. See Spot.
Sam strokes Spot.
See Susan. See Sandy.
"Sit, Spot!" says Sam.
Spot sits.
"Sit, Sandy!" says Susan.
Sandy sits.
Spot stands.
"Stay, Spot!" says Sam.
Sandy stands.
"Stay, Sandy!" says Susan.
Spot sniffs Sandy.
Sandy sniffs Spot.
"Stop sniffing!" says Sam.
"Stop sniffing!" says Susan.
Sam. Spot. Susan. Sandy.
See. Stroke. Say. Sit.
Stand, Stay. Sniff. Stop.

Tim Hopkins

TATE THEFT TERROR—THIRTY TRAPPED. The Taiwanese thug T'ang Tse Tung took the tabloid: "Two thieves terrorise tourist throng, then take the tube to Tottenham. Their till takings top twenty-three thousand. They're tanned, thickset, thirtyish . . . " T'ang thought: "That's the twins." Telephoning Tottenham to tackle the two toughs, T'ang talked turkey, threatening to tell the Triads: "The Tate, that's traditionally Triad territory. They tend to torture trouble-making transgressors; trigger-happy thieves, too. They truss them tightly together, tattoo their torsos, then turn those twiddly things—thumbscrews . . ." The twins trembled; their thumbs throbbing. T'ang tittered. "Then they try the tongs technique to twist tongues." Tongue twisting! These threats took their toll.

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. Meadow
2. Woollen cloth
3. Clothmaker
4. Gangster played by Beatty
5. Gentleman in black velvet
6. Golfing equipment
7. Imparts variable motion
8. Blair
9. Bentley's detective
10. Principal goddess

Answers overleaf

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Terrified, the twins talked, telling T'ang to take the twenty-three thousand to the Triads. "Thanks," T'ang told them, "that's their trade—takeaways."

Kevin Smith

Perhaps people previously preferred political principles, pondered President Portillo. Predecessors' portraits—Peel, Palmerston, Patten—packed Portillo's premises, provoking passing *pensées*—Prince Philip's protective pistols popping pathetic pellets; praetorian parliamentarians promptly producing proper pieces, pumping Philip; pink puddles; predictable pandemonium.

Portillo's platitudes, Portillo perceived, persuaded people: pick power's practitioner. Prats! Plenty promoted Portillo—particularly party paymasters (poor, prattling pensioners pretending Portillo's pre-eminence predicted perpetual perks, port-passing, peerages). Portillo's presidential proclamation produced press plaudits.

People—pretty pig-headedly—praised Portillo's patience, propriety, personality. Portillo presented phoney policies, passed peculiar proposals, proscribed public parades. Prisons punished paupers. Pawnbrokers prospered. Privatisation plans pinched patients, passengers, pupils painfully. Pay plummeted; prices progressed pointlessly.

Perhaps, President Portillo pondered, people prefer pragmatism.

Pitter-pat. Plimsolls paced Portillo's parquet. Premonition plagued Portillo—phantom pinkoes? Palace poltergeists? Projectiles pierced Portillo, panting pathetically. Practically posthumously, Portillo peeped. Platt!

Bill Greenwell

No 3296 Set by Russell Lucas

Excerpts from the Queen's speech drafted by Wilde, Joyce, Waugh or the stylist of your choice. In by 23 September

Quiz answers

All are British rivers: 1) Lea; 2) Tweed; 3) Weaver; 4) Clyde; 5) Mole; 6) Tees; 7) Cam; 8) Orwell; 9) Trent; 10) Isis. Note: 5: Toasted by Jacobites for causing the death of William III

CHESS

When your name means "of the stars" you may well expect to be favoured by fate. In his mid-thirties, Paul van der Sterran has become the new and quite unexpected luminary on the chess scene. This year, he easily won the Dutch championship and then sensationally qualified for the Candidates last month in Biel. His next rating will be skirting the super grandmaster barrier of 2600.

At the Lloyds Bank Masters he won his first five, and then met me in round six.

White: P van der Sterren Black: J Plaskett. Lloyds Bank Masters 1993

1.d4 d6 Nf3 Bg4 I recently recorded a video in Grandmaster Videos "Foxy Openings" series on this. We decided to dub the system "The Sidestep", and having bragged about it on camera, I felt honour-bound to give it a whirl.

3.c4 Bxf3 4.exf3 g6 5.Nc3 Bg7 6.Be3 Nd7 7.Qd2 Ngf6 8.d5 c6 9.Be2 Rc8 10.0-0 cxd5 11.cxd5 0-0 12.a4 Qa5 13.Ra3 a6 14.Rb1 Ne5 15.Rb3 Qc7 16.Rd1 Ned7 17.f4 Nc5 18.Ra3 Qa5 19.Rb1 Qb4 20.Qd1 a5 21.Nb5 . . . White has outplayed me. 21.Bb5 was also strong, probably forcing the desperate 21 . . . Nh5.

21 . . . Qe4 22.Bf3 Qf5 23.h3 Na6 24.Bb6! Qxf4 25.Bxa5 Nc5 26.Bd2 Qf5 27.Be3 Nce4 28.Rd3 Nc5 29.Rd4 Nfd7 30.b4! . . . This should be decisive.

30 . . . Bxd4 31.Nxd4 Qe5 32.bxc5 Nxc5 33.a5 Ra8 34.Rb5 Rfc8 35.g3 Rc7 36.Kg2 Qf6 37.h4 Qe5 38.Ne2 Rac8 39.Bd4 Qf5 40.g4 Qd3 41.Qxd3 Nxd3 42.Be4 Nc1 43.Ng3 Rc4 44.Be3 R/8-c7 45.Rb2 Kf8 46.f3 Rc3 47.Bh6+ Ke8 48.Bd2 Ra3 49.Bxc1 Rxc1 50.Rxb7 Black is now actually able to put up some real resistance.

50 . . . Ra2+ 51.Kh3 Kd8! 52.g5 Rxa5 53.h5 Ra2 54.Rb8+ Kc7! 55.Rf8? It had to retreat. **55 . . . Rg1 56.Rxf7 Rag2 57.Rxe7+ Kd8 58.Rxh7 Rxg3+ 59.Kh4 R/3-g2 60.Kh3 Rxg5 61.Kh2 R/1-g2 62.Kh1 gxh5 63.f4 Rg7 64.Rh8+ Rg8 65.Rxh5 R/2-g4 66.Rh6 Kc7 67.Bf5 Rxf4 68.Bh3 Rg5 69.Bg2 Rf2 Rf2 70.Be4 Rg4** White resigned.

This slice of good fortune deposited me in clear first place with 5½/6. But my reign was brief, because this was my next game . . .

White: J Plaskett Black: J Speelman. Lloyds Bank Masters 1993

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.g3 0-0 5.Bg2 Nc6 Nf3 b6 Very new. 7.Ne5 Bg7 8.Bg5 . . . My original intention was 8.Qa4, but I assumed that that could be played next move anyway.

8 . . . Nxe5 A complete surprise. Play should now continue 9.Bxb7 Nxc4 10.Bxf6! Bxc3+ 11.bxc3 Qxf6 12.Bxa8 Rxa8 with approximate equality.

9.Bxf6? Qc8! I hadn't seen that one either, and I realised that already White's position was beyond saving.

10.Bxe5 Bxg2 11.Rg1 Bxc3 12.bxc3 Bb7 13.c5 d6! 14.cxd6 cxd6 15.Bxd6 Rd8 16.Bf4 Qxc3+ 17.Kf1 Rxd4 18.Qc1 Qa5 19.Be3 Rd7 20.f3 Rc8 21.Qb2 Rc3 22.Bf2 Qe5 23.Rb1 Qc7 24.Kg2 Rc2 25.Rgc1 Bxf3+! White resigned.

What was left of me staggered on to a final total of 7/10 and a share of fifth place, while Mr Speelman ended up, for the second successive year, outright winner with 8½.

Jon demonstrated his all-round mastery of chess, particularly impressive being the wins he managed to squeeze out of two drawn pawn endings.

White: J Plaskett Black: M Sadler. Lloyds Bank Masters 1993

1.Nf3 d5 2.c4 d4 3.b4 g6 4.g3 a5 5.Bb2 Bg7 5.a3 e5 7.d3 b6 8.Bg7 Bb7 9.0-0 Ne7 10.e3 0-0 11.exd4 exd4 12.Nbd2 Na6 13.bxa5 bxa5 14.Re1 Nc5 15.Nb3 Nxb3 16.Qxb3 Rb8 17.Qc2 c5 18.Rab1? . . . As soon as my left hand left the piece I saw that 18.Bc1 was much stronger.

18 . . . Bc6 19.Nd2 Bxg2 20.Kxg2 Qd7 21.Bc1 Nc6 22.Ne4 Rxb1 23.Qxb1 Rb8 24.Qc2 Ne5 25.Bf4 Qc6 26.Rb1 Re8 27.Bxe5 Bxe5 28.Kg1 f5 29.Nd2 Bc7!? 30.a4 g5!? 31.Qb3! . . . The critical moment.

31 . . . Rb8 32.Qd1 Rxb1? 32 . . . Re8 had to be tried.

33.Qxb1 Qxa4 34.Qb7 . . . The black "a" pawn is little danger and it is well known that queen and knight tend to cooperate together better than queen and bishop. With so many loose pawns to worry about as well, Sadler quickly goes under.

34 . . . Qd7 35.Nb3 Qd6 36.Qc8+ Qd8 37.Qe6+ Kh8 38.Nxc5 f4 39.Nd7 a4 40.Nf6 Qf8 41.Qf5 Kg7 42.Qxg5+ Kh8 43.Qf5 Kg7 44.Nh5+ Kg8 45.Qd5+ Kh8 46.Qxd4+ Kg8 47.Nf6+ Kf7 48.Nd5. Black resigned.

James Plaskett

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BACKCHAT

Some readers didn't understand a past column. **Mat Coward** explains himself

One or two readers have been kind enough to ask me to explain a little more fully the term "the bollocksisation of Britain", which I used here a couple of weeks ago. "Frankly, old thing," they write, "we couldn't see what it was you were after, at all."

Very well. Did you know that what used to be the Office of the Paymaster General is now a company called Paymaster? I haven't seen that word in print, so I can only guess at its typography: something like the *Guardian*'s masthead, I imagine, mixed upper and lower cases, suggesting dynamic informality, ironic modernity.

Anyway, the point is that the Office of the Paymaster General, while perhaps a slightly archaic term, did convey a meaning. It was an office, in the sense of a department, where the person in charge of paying for things went about his dull business. It named the sort of facility that every state must obviously need. It made sense.

Paymaster, though, means nothing; intentionally. It sounds like a computer game, or rather, an embarrassingly out-of-date TV version of a computer game, produced by a man at Channel 4 who still thinks robo-dancing is really chillin'. Paymaster is two words run together, German-style. It's zippy, it's zappy, it's hip, hop and hup. It's bollocks.

Bollocksisation is the murder of meaning. Our alien government, composed as it is of microwave beings from a distant star, is on a mission to render the nation meaningless. If it works here, it will start on the rest of the world.

The Avon and Somerset police force ("service", I mean) has banned smoking in its interview rooms. No doubt they'll still send people to prison for committing crimes of economic resistance, still send people to prison for committing no crimes at all—and, I suppose, continue not to send anyone to prison who has actually committed a crime—but they're not going to be responsible for giving you passive smoking. The Sheehy report was completely unnecessary: the police force can bollocksise itself, with no help from above.

Health—the word, the concept, the industry—has long been at the forefront of bollocksisation. Currie, Bottomley, Harman—great bollocksisers, all. British drinking-water becomes too foul to drink; the British government spends more than a billion pounds a year telling poor people to eat fresh fruit. Bollocks, or what?

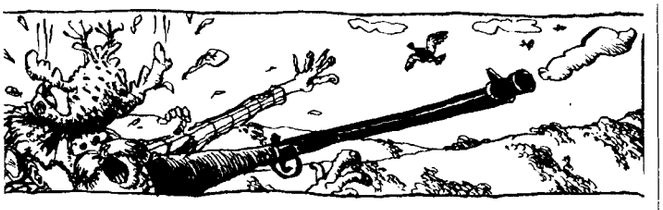
But it's more than that; it's not just silliness. A bollocksist government is a conspiracy against sense. It daily commits acts of baffling stupidity, cutting off its own legs to spite its belly, not through incompetence, but deliberately; a bit like those tiresome art students of the early seventies, who dreamed of destroying civilisation through the scientific application of absurdity (perhaps that's where you've seen him before, that's why he seems so tantalisingly familiar: John Major wrote the Situationist's Charter).

Denationalisation is bollocksism's key tool. Privatisation increases costs, reduces supply, restricts competition, punishes enterprise, and loses votes. In other words: it works, perfectly. Are railways the heart of capitalism? Good, then let's get rid of them.

Bollocksists, both right and liberal, name things, instead of doing them; they redesign things, instead of reforming them; they reassess wrongs, instead of repealing them.

Majorism is much more bollocksist than Thatcherism. She made some sense, from a class war perspective: get a big stone, smash the peasants' heads in with it, and then drink their blood. Fair enough. It was only towards the end that she began to go all bollocksy on us: well, can you explain the poll tax in rational terms?

FORTEANA



Herbie doesn't exist solely in Walt Disney's imagination, says **Paul Sieveking**

If you have had an unsatisfactory time with garage repairs recently, perhaps you should go to Indonesia, where thousands of "magic garages" have been set up. They work by "ketok" or "knock" magic, whose origin is credited to a man called Turut, who opened an auto body workshop in Blitar, East Java, in 1956. (Like many Indonesians, he used only one name.)

By the time Turut died in 1982, aged 74, he was regarded as the Merlin of mechanics, and had many disciples. Though he denied in a newspaper interview that he had any truck with the supernatural, his followers insist otherwise.

"I believe that he had supernatural power," said Eko Sugiman, 27, a magic garage owner from west Jakarta. Apprentices undergo rigid technical training, as well as periodic fasting, promising never to cheat their customers.

The first magic garages opened in Jakarta about ten years ago. Repairs are performed in sheds behind high fences. Customers are barred from watching, or even seeing the tools. Where other garages offer a cost estimate, magic garages set firm prices, which always include one or more of the number five—because that's the way Turut did it. For example, a job costing rupiahs 800,000 (about £275) would be billed as rupiahs 800,005.

Ordinary tools are used for some work, said Heriyanto, who owns two shops in south Jakarta, with magic applied "only in certain conditions". He would not elaborate. "We have to keep secret our equipment because it is our lives." He claimed a car needing two weeks to repair in a conventional garage could be done by his specialists in a week at one third the cost.

The magic mechanics keep in touch socially, but have not yet formed a professional association. There is no official count of the number of ketok establishments, as most have too few assets to register as businesses under Indonesian law and do not need a licence to operate. (AP, 18 May 1993.)

Closer to home, some cars seem to exhibit a magic of their own. Last November, Malcolm Larter of Bury St Edmunds left his Austin Montego in gear to stop it rolling downhill. The starter motor started up on its own, and it began to go forwards, pushing against Rafael Desira's Fiat Uno, which suffered minor damage. The Austin, unable to go any further, burst into flames in frustration. A possible clue to this episode is that Mr Larter is a supervisor for Photo Me International, the automatic photo booth company. Perhaps his car felt neglected and wanted to show him it could be just as automatic. (*Bury Free Press*, November 1992.)

The more prosaic explanation was that the electric relays had become damp. Jack Oates, director of a building firm in Horbury, near Wakefield, left his three-year-old Volvo while he made a business call. The vehicle started itself up and moved off in reverse towards a group of parked cars. Mr Oates dashed out, jumped in and brought it to a halt. He put the keys into the ignition and tried to switch off—but the three year old refused to obey. Mechanics were called out and as they approached the car it switched off its engine, then started up on its own. A Volvo spokesman tried to make light of it: "The starter motor worked loose, twisting two wires together, which caused a short circuit." (*Scotsman*, *Daily Mail*, 8 March 1984.)

The following year, John Potts left his company car—a Vauxhall Cavalier, carefully parked overnight outside his home in Dawlish, Devon—in gear and with the handbrake on. In the morning, neighbours complained that the car was blocking their exit. It was 60 yards from where he had parked. A fault in the ignition switch, possibly caused by rain, had turned it on, engaging the starter. The car was dragged along in gear until the motor burned out and the battery went flat. Seven months later, a similar fault started up a Renault in Bradford, West Yorkshire. It crashed through a closed garage door and into a wall. (*Western Morning News*, 2 February; *Daily Telegraph*, 4 February; *Daily Mirror*, 14 September 1985.)

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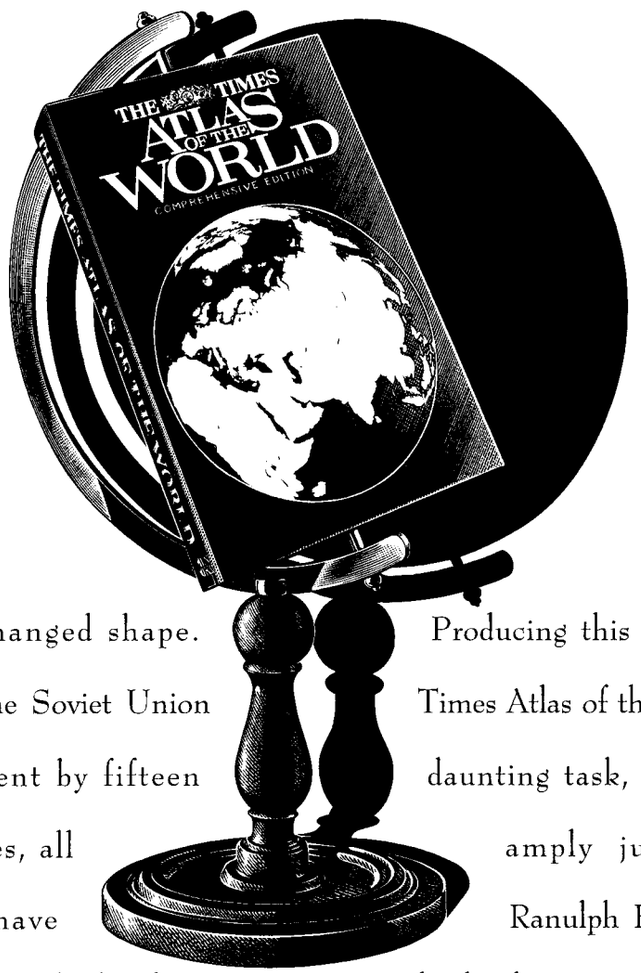

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